



# LIFE OF ST. MELANIA

*CARDINAL RAMPOLLA*

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# The Life of St. Melania

By His Eminence  
CARDINAL RAMPOLLA

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## PREFACE.

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A DISCUSSION upon the literary recreations of statesmen out of office might form an interesting chapter in any new edition of the *Curiosities of Literature*. Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone, as we are all aware, used in turns to find solace for the reverses of political fortune by the ardour of their devotion to letters. If this devotion took very divergent forms, according to their respective and varying tastes, it none the less lent a certain impressiveness to the whole arena of statecraft in which they were the acknowledged leaders. So no one who knows anything of the history of the last Conclave can fail to realise that when Cardinal Rampolla, less than three years after his dignified submission to the veto of a hostile government, published a stately folio attesting his continued allegiance to the studies which had been his first love\*, he not only set a great example of Christian fortitude, but once more justified the choice which had made him both Prince of the Church and one of its most influential administrators. As Abbot Cuthbert Butler, than whom no one more competent to pronounce judgment, has written in our leading theological review :—

“That such a book should have been produced by one who for nearly twenty years had borne the burdens

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\* *Santa Melania Giuniore, Senatrice Romana* ; Documenti Contemporanei e Note. Published with facsimiles, &c., by the Vatican Press, Rome, 1905.

which now fall on a Cardinal Secretary of State, and a Secretary of State under a master so active and exacting as Leo XIII., is certainly a phenomenon. For in this volume Cardinal Rampolla shows that on the common basis of scholarship and learning he can meet on equality professional scholars."—(*The Journal of Theological Studies*, VII., 632).

As for the contents of the Cardinal's great work, it consists of an edition of the Latin and Greek texts of the *Life of St. Melania the Younger*, the Latin text, as His Eminence explains, having been first discovered by himself now nearly twenty-five years ago in the library of the Escorial. But over and above the text, his volume has served as the shrine of an immense apparatus of miscellaneous learning. In the words of Abbot Butler's notice just referred to, the book "probably contains all that can be known from extant materials concerning the younger Melania and the whole circle in which she moved."

To translate the whole monograph in its entirety just as Cardinal Rampolla has given it to the world would require a volume of more than a thousand octavo pages, neither would the vast array of bibliographical references and the many minute points of erudition upon which the author spends so much space and learning have any interest for the general reader. Those who are keen about investigating such details are usually in a position to study the original for themselves without difficulty. At the same time the illustrious author, amid other matters of diversified interest, has incorporated in his work a straightforward summary of the history of St. Melania and

her times, which, in the opinion of the translator and the friends whom she consulted, it was well worth while to render accessible to an English public. With the generous permission of His Eminence Cardinal Rampolla, this has been attempted in the present volume ; while the author's biographical sketch has here and there been supplemented, where an interpolation seemed feasible without interference with the sequence of thought, by sundry passages translated directly from the Latin or Greek text of the original Life. It is hoped that the result of this patchwork will be found to read not too unevenly as a piece of continuous narrative.

There are *Saints' Lives* and *Saints' Lives*. In no species of serious composition, as Father Delehaye, the Bollandist, has lately instructed us, have so many different types of historically worthless materials—folk-lore, myth, legend, not to speak of pure fabrication—palmed themselves off upon the unsuspecting good faith of the pious believer. We might almost say that the bulk of these documents, especially those belonging to certain specified epochs, are devoid of any touch of human individuality. They are like the portraits of Holy Doctors or Virgins, painted according to the canons of Byzantine art. We might shuffle all the names and almost all the dates, and the new arrangement would be just as near the truth, as much or as little instructive as the old. Miracles abound in such records, together with virtues and moral reflections of the most approved quality, but there is nothing for the memory to lay hold of. To have read one is to have read them all.

Still, there are some few remarkable exceptions to be found in this incredibly weary waste of banality and tediousness. Here and there, the searcher, in turning over the leaves of old lectionaries and passionaries, whether Latin or Greek, will light upon some really human document, which will well repay him for the trouble he has taken. It may be a set of Acts of some martyrdom in Rome or Asia Minor, embodying fragments of the official interrogatories of the prisoner, or the description of an eye-witness. It may be the brief memoir, dictated by some hermit in the desert, full of vivid touches, breathing the very atmosphere of those strange surroundings. It may be the narrative of the life of some great teacher or religious foundress, written down according to the faithful memory of a disciple, one who is far too impressed with the holiness of his subject to tamper with the truth, or alter in one tittle the facts of which his eyes and ears were the witnesses.

Such is the *Life of St. Melania the Younger*, which Cardinal Rampolla was the first to give to the world entire. He has edited it with a wealth of erudition which few of those who used to discuss the Cardinal Secretary of State so freely would have dreamed of connecting with his name; but valuable as are the introduction, notes, and dissertations which form the bulk of his handsome volume, the most precious part of all is the text itself, emphatically a human document, belonging to one of the most interesting periods of Christian history. St. Melania was born in A.D. 383, and died in 439. She spent her early life, of which a full account is given, in Rome, travelled all over the

Roman world, and finally settled in Jerusalem, where she met St. Jerome in his declining years. The Life consequently belongs to that extraordinarily interesting period of the break up of paganism and the early incursions of the barbarians, the last days of Roman greatness before Constantinople became the permanent centre of empire. The narrator writes as one who had been the devoted servant of the Saint, who had accompanied her and her husband in some of their wanderings, and who finally became a priest and inmate of an affiliated religious establishment in Jerusalem, the association embracing both monks and nuns (like the double monasteries of England a few centuries later), of which St. Melania was both foundress and Superior. The general features and even the details of the story have long been known through the redaction of the so-called *Metaphrast*, belonging to a much later century. But the stilted and characterless phraseology of the *Metaphrast* leaves a very different picture from the vigorous if rude language of the contemporary who had lived with the Saint and loved her. We should be inclined to consider it one of the most deeply interesting hagiographical documents which the early Church has preserved to us.

The living interest of the narrative strikes us from the very first sentences of the biographer's quaint dedication, addressed to some unknown Bishop:—

“Blessed be God,” he says, “who prompted thy honoured person, O most holy priest of God, to write to my insignificance, encouraging me to tell the story of the life of our most blessed mother Melania, now

dwelling with the Angels. At first I resisted thy Holiness because I was not equal to such a work. But just as God, when Moses demurred about governing His people, did not yield to him, but gave him his brother to help him, so thou, O priest of Christ, hast lent thy prayers in order to aid me in my task. For me even this is not assistance enough, for I think that surely no one would be able to tell her virtues, the glowing heat of her renunciation, her faith or her benefactions or her watchings; or again, her death, her patient endurance, or her abstemiousness, her gentleness, her humility, or the scantiness of her apparel. It is true that Holy Scripture says: 'Give the wise man opportunity and he will become wiser yet'; but, I fear lest, while wishing as I do to declare her praises, I should rather do her an injury through telling my story ill. Still, I have likened myself to the fisher-folk casting their lines into the water, who know well that they cannot fish up all the fish in the sea, and that, not even if all the fishermen in the world assembled together, could they do it any the better, but yet each of them doing his utmost as well as he is able, gathers in the end a goodly store."

How living and real is the personal interest of the narrative, despite the biographer's many apologies for his shortcomings, may best be illustrated by a passage which has accidentally escaped transcription in the pages which follow, but which well deserves to be preserved. Melania, the great Roman heiress, was married, as we shall see, at the age of only fourteen years, and much against her will, to one Pinianus, a noble young Christian, who was destined later on to become,

through his wife's influence, the sharer of all her ascetical practices. At the very outset of their married life, Melania made a desperate effort to persuade her husband to live with her merely as a dear brother. To this Pinianus would not at first consent, but eventually, when he had learnt to see an indication of God's will in the premature death of the two children that were born to them, he assented to his wife's desire in this matter, though in other things he still clung to the world, and more particularly to the style and dress suited to his senatorial rank. Some years passed in this fashion, years marked no doubt by his bride's unceasing prayers in secret that he, like herself, might become enamoured of the poverty of Christ. But, as we learn from the Latin text of the Life—

“One day the Saint, taking Pinianus aside, began tenderly and respectfully to question him. What she asked was whether carnal love had still any place in his heart, whether it ever occurred to him now to think of her as a wife. Pinianus, with a smiling face, and full of the joy of the Lord, answered her cheerily, ‘Happy art thou to love thy husband after such sort. Be satisfied on my account, quite satisfied in our Lord, that ever since we made together our promise to God, I have had just the same feeling for thee as for Albina, thy saintly mother.’ On hearing these words Melania kissed him upon the breast and upon the hands, and gave glory to God for this firm resolution. But a few days afterwards, anxious that he should always advance in perfection, she said to him again; ‘Pinianus, my lord, listen to me as a mother, as thy spiritual sister; lay aside these costly Cilician robes, dress thyself in



more sober fashion.' Like the boy that he was, Pinianus, on hearing this, was rather cast down, but in order that he might not see her look unhappy, and knowing that all was done for God and for his own eternal welfare, he assented with a good grace, and began to dress in the cheaper garments of Antioch. But Melania, like a busy bee, was eager to add flower to flower on his behalf. She pressed him to adopt an even coarser dress, and this in fact he did. Eventually his clothes cost no more than a gold piece, or two thirds of a gold piece, and Melania fashioned them for him herself out of the cheapest natural wool without dye of any sort."

There is something wonderfully delicate and natural about the flavour of all this. Perhaps some such touch of what we might almost call a sweet playfulness, if it were not for the earnest purpose which underlies the whole, was needed to relieve that sterner impression which Melania's apostolate of asceticism could hardly fail to produce. In any case there can be no two opinions as to the lifelike character of this peep into the domestic relations of these noble souls. For this reason alone I should find it hard to believe that the incident, which appears in this form in the Latin text only, had been recorded by any other hand than that of the chaplain who knew them both so intimately.

In the elaborate apparatus of introduction, notes and appendices with which Cardinal Rampolla has equipped his edition of the texts preserved to us, the view is defended that the Latin redaction is the older, and that it may be regarded as representing more accurately the original, penned probably in that

language by Gerontius within a few years of the Saint's death at Jerusalem. As might be expected of a work of such importance, which more than any other document of the period abounds in local colouring, the Cardinal's monograph has been freely discussed. In particular M. l'Abbé Adhémar d'Alès, Professor at the Institut Catholique of Paris, after two very appreciative articles in the *Etudes*\*, has contributed to the *Analecta Bollandiana* a minute and painstaking study of certain significant passages in the Latin and Greek texts of the Life. In his opinion, which in this respect runs counter to the views of the illustrious editor and those of Professor Diekamp,† the original was written by Gerontius in Greek, and the Latin text which we now possess offers only a later and somewhat unintelligent adaptation of that original by another hand. The dispute is not one which could be reviewed in any detail in a popular work like the present, but I may, perhaps, be permitted to record here my own theory, already advanced in the *Month*,‡ that the biographer himself was responsible for both redactions. Granted that he possessed a sufficient knowledge of Latin, which seems to follow from the fact (mentioned by Peter the Iberian) that he always used the Roman liturgy in Melania's own oratory at Jerusalem, it would seem natural enough that he should himself tell his story twice over, with variations, for different audiences. To my thinking, this sup-

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\* *Etudes*, July 20th, 1906, and August 20th, 1906.

† *Theologische Revue*, May 22nd, 1906.

‡ *The Month*, November, 1906, pp. 510 and 517.

position presents less difficulty than the theory of a Greek original, which no longer survives, modified first of all by a Greek editor and then by a Latin one, neither of whom had any scruple in departing from or rearranging the text of the prototype. Abbé Adhémar d'Alès assigns our existing Greek text to about the year 475~~0~~, and he believes the Latin to be of somewhat later date. Cardinal Rampolla, on the other hand, regards the Latin as the original language in which the prototype was composed, our present Latin text having been written down in the lifetime of Gerontius, the author, while the Greek recension belongs to the next century. But the dispute is in any case of little practical importance, and I may follow the example of M. Georges Goyau who, in his admirable article in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, afterwards expanded into a complete biography in the series "Les Saints," has utilized the details furnished by both texts as contributions of equal value for the history of the Saint. Indeed, this has been the course followed in practice by all who have written on the subject, and M. l'Abbé d'Alès himself, in his more popular articles in the *Etudes*, has not hesitated to draw largely upon the data which are furnished by the Latin recension alone. In conclusion, I can only express a hope that the modified and much curtailed presentment of Cardinal Rampolla's work contained in the pages which follow may not be hindered by its incompleteness from affording some indication of the importance of his researches, and in particular may not fail to convey a truthful impression of the Saint whose

## PREFACE

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figure stood out so grandly in the midst of a decadent and corrupt age not too dissimilar from that in which we live.

HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.

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# INTRODUCTION.

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## Cardinal Rampolla's Preface.

IT has not been our intention in the following sketch to provide a complete life of Saint Melania the Younger. This is a task we willingly leave to the wiser and more skilful pens of others. We merely wish to outline, however roughly, the splendid figure of this noble Roman lady, and to summarise the authentic sources of information regarding her career. Until recently, it must be confessed, we had no record of the Saint except what was left to us in the Greek tongue by Simon Logothetes—better known under the name of the Metaphrast—and a few allusions in the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius. The incidental references to her which we find scattered here and there in the writings of Saint Paulinus of Nola, of Saint Augustine, and of Saint Jerome, are limited to passing allusions and particular incidents, which might be of use for the knowledge of certain details or to clear up some isolated point in dispute, but which could never constitute the basis of a biography. In the West, the memory of the Roman heroine was completely obscured and forgotten until quite late in the middle ages. The first to revive it was Peter de

Natalibus, who, in the year 1382, gave a very brief synopsis of the references to the Saint found in that Latin version of Palladius' work which was current in his time. Later historians and hagiographers, even of eminence, confined themselves, it might be said, almost exclusively either to the Latin version of the Metaphrast, which was very imperfectly rendered by Surius, or to the incomplete and interpolated text of Palladius, the source of not a few historical and chronological errors. It is also surprising to find that writers of still more recent times, whilst attaching importance to the documents which have recently come to light, have nevertheless passed over the Natale XIII. of S. Paulinus of Nola, which was discovered by Muratori towards the end of 1697, and which contains precious information regarding Melania and her husband Pinianus.

Such were, even in our own days, the only available sources of historical information, when in the October of the year 1884, during a brief sojourn in the Royal Monastery of the Escorial, we availed ourselves of the courteous permission of the Librarian to examine some codices in the important collection with which Philip II. has enriched that wonderful building. Amongst the other manuscripts we came across one which at once attracted our attention. It was the Life of Saint Melania the Younger in a Latin text hitherto unknown.

As we rapidly perused it, we were struck with the simplicity of the style, and the abundance of detail

as well as with the authoritative information of the writer, who was evidently a contemporary of the Saint, and an eye-witness of the facts which he related. It was not an easy matter to deal with an unpublished document of the first half of the fourth century, therefore we set about transcribing it as accurately as possible with our own hand. Other anxious cares prevented us for a long time from making this copy known, and it thus remained hidden for several years. Meanwhile, in 1885, Molinier and Kohler\* published certain passages of a codex in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* of Paris, which treated of Melania's travels in Northern Africa, Egypt and Palestine. Four years later, through the efforts of the learned Father de Smedt and his Bollandist colleagues, there was published all that remained of the Life of Saint Melania the Younger in the same codex, and in another still more ancient one in the Library of Chartres, both of them, however, mutilated. The distinguished editor supplied the gaps by falling back upon the Latin version of the Greek text of the Metaphrast. In April, 1900, the second International Congress of Christian Archæology met in Rome. Yielding to the courteous insistence of the Committee, we communicated to the Congress a compendious notice of the whole text of the biography of the holy matron which we had discovered fifteen years before, to which we added some general observations, with the view of throwing

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\* *Analecta Bollandiano*, t. VIII., p. 16-23.



into relief its exceptional importance. This communication was received with indulgent favour.

In our studies of the Life of Saint Melania we received much encouragement from high authorities, especially from the Bollandists, just mentioned, who were anxious to have a document of such moment printed entire. We are now in a position to correspond with this desire, and we are the better able to do so owing to the discovery of fresh manuscripts by the same Bollandist Fathers, more particularly of a copy of the Greek text of Saint Melania's Life. These materials have enabled us to publish the text of the Escorial in a more accurate form, with the addition of a critical apparatus.

And here a few words may be said of the author of Melania's biography. In this work he clearly reveals himself to us as the Saint's familiar friend, the companion of her travels, and her chaplain.

In the year 404 he was living in Rome, and accompanied Melania on the occasion of her visit to the Princess Serena. He was also with her in 439, in the Monastery on Mount Olivet, where he was present at her holy death and shared in the general sorrow for her loss. He gratefully acknowledges that it was to Melania he owed his conversion from a life of worldliness, and the subsequent grace of the priesthood. He accompanied Melania in all her travels in Africa, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. He received from her the charge to build a monastery for men on Mount

Olivet, and assisted her in the direction of her monastery for virgins. At her death he assumed the government of both monasteries on Mount Olivet. Now, we know for certain from Cyril of Scythopolis, a very reliable writer of the sixth century, that Melania's successor in the direction of the monasteries of Palestine was one Gerontius, of whom Cyril wrote that *he was the successor of the Blessed Melania*. Saint Melania died on the 31st December, 439, and Gerontius, her successor, continued to govern the monasteries until 485, a period of forty-five years.

Peter the Iberian, who was at one time a fervent Catholic and a devoted client of Melania, was a contemporary of Gerontius. After the Council of Chalcedon, he allowed himself to be drawn into the Monophysite heresy by Theodosius, who had thrust himself into the Bishopric of Jerusalem. Peter the Iberian was consecrated Bishop of Majuma, near Gaza, in Palestine. He had lived for some years in the Saint's Monastery, together with a certain John, who came with him from Constantinople. Peter had intimate relations with Melania's chaplain, from whom he received the religious habit.

Now, the anonymous biographer of Peter the Iberian tells us definitely that the priest who was superior of Melania's monastery at Mount Olivet was no other than Gerontius, a native of Jerusalem, who, on account of his noble and virtuous disposition, had been brought up from childhood by Melania and Pinianus, adding

that his virtues merited for him ordination to the priesthood. But the whole passage is of importance and deserves to be quoted in full. The exact words of Peter's anonymous biographer are as follows :—

“ This Gerontius, originally from Jerusalem, who enjoyed very wide renown, received when a child all that was necessary for his maintenance from Saint Melania and her consort. Having been piously brought up in their house, he was judged worthy to receive the holy habit of the monks, for he was remarkable for his irreproachable conduct. Therefore they both took him to the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, and gave him the habit on the mountain, and thus he was, so to say, invested with it by the hands of Our Lord Himself, after he had prayed that God would bestow upon him with the habit the three gifts of right faith, of holiness, and of tears. He was, indeed, favoured with these three gifts, especially with the gift of tears ; so that being the priest and the superior of the monasteries of Mount Olivet, he often on the same day of the week celebrated three masses, one on the holy mount, a second in the monastery for men, and the third in the monastery for women. During the remaining time, he celebrated in private for Saint Melania, according to the custom of the Church of Rome ; and at each of these assemblies, from the beginning of the mass until the end, he shed tears so copiously, accompanied by such expressions of sorrow and of contrition, that the whole congrega-

tion could not refrain from bursting out into cries, groans and lamentations."

Further testimony regarding Gerontius is afforded by John, Bishop of Majuma, who was a native of Southern Palestine. During the administration of Severus, the Patriarch of Antioch (512-518), he wrote a work of considerable importance, entitled the *Plerophoriæ*, consisting of anecdotes favourable to the Monophysites, which were mostly contributed by Peter the Iberian. These have been preserved to us in a Syriac codex, now in the British Museum, which was written in 875, and of which F. Nau, in 1898, published a French translation. Now in the XLI. chapter of the work Bishop John relates that in consequence of a grave nocturnal scandal which had occurred in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre through the behaviour of an unworthy deacon, the whole city was seized with terror, and that Peter the Iberian told his monks that "Gerontius, the deacon of Blessed Melania's monastery, from that day fasted twice whenever he had to take part in the evening office." After this clear testimony from such varied sources, from writers both in the Catholic and in the Monophysite camp, we are forced to the conclusion that Gerontius is without doubt the priest to whose care Melania confided the direction of her monasteries, and that he is consequently the author of the Life of which we are now treating.

Gerontius regarded Melania as his spiritual mother,

and during her lifetime was devotedly attached to her as one from whom he had received so many benefits. He was her constant companion, accompanying her to Africa, to Jerusalem, and to Constantinople. He does not mention that he was also with her on the occasion of her second visit to the monasteries of Egypt. He seldom speaks of himself, but even these brief allusions reveal to us his modesty, his piety, and his zeal in co-operating with Melania for the welfare of the monasteries which she founded. We have striking proof of this zeal in the beautiful Monastery of the Ascension, which was erected under his direction about the year 436, in an incredibly short space of time. His kindness and his strict veracity are also clearly discernible.

He does not, indeed, seem to have been a scholar conspicuous for literary culture. He was rather a simple, God-fearing man, wholly devoted to the monastic life and the offices of religion. Melania, who had educated him, and thus knew his virtue, esteemed him so highly that she admitted him to her intimate friendship and reposed the utmost confidence in him. The fact that the Saint regarded him as worthy to be entrusted with the care of her monasteries is an indisputable proof of the excellent qualities of Gerontius. He gives us no indication in his writings of the exceptionally fervent piety and the gift of tears which the author of the *Life of Peter the Iberian* attributes to him. His practice of sometimes saying

three Masses on the one day was not contrary to the discipline then prevailing, which allowed a certain liberty in that respect. It only proves that Melania had but one chaplain to provide the religious services of her monasteries. What the author of the *Life of Peter the Iberian* tells us is confirmed in Saint Melania's own biography—at least with regard to her last years on earth. Of the three Masses said by Gerontius on the same day, one was for the monks of the Ascension monastery and one for those of the monastery erected near the graves of Pinianus and Albina. The third Mass was celebrated in the monastery in which Melania resided, and to which an oratory was attached, where the Holy Sacrifice was offered on every Sunday and Friday, as well as on festivals. Saint Melania's biographer tells us that she communicated every day, according to the practice in Rome. It would seem therefore that she assisted at the Mass which was said daily for her by her chaplain.

Readers who are not familiar with the customs of the early centuries may also regard it as very improbable that Gerontius should have received the monk's habit from Saint Melania, as described by the biographer of *Peter the Iberian*. But if we bear in mind that everyone was free in that age to put on the religious habit how and when he pleased, that it was a purely private act, which was performed without the intervention of any authority, and unaccompanied by any form of ritual, we shall not feel surprised that

Gerontius should have received it from a woman. We have an example recorded, belonging to the same period which proves how worthy of credence the biographer's statement is in itself. When the famous Evagrius Ponticus fled from the allurements of Constantinople he went to Jerusalem, where he was entertained by the elder Melania. Upon his recovery from illness he was drawn to embrace the monastic life, and, we are told, received the religious habit from his hostess.

The monasteries founded by Melania continued to flourish under the direction of Gerontius for twelve years after her death, until the promulgation of the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon (November, 451). Whether owing to the esteem of the Empress Eudoxia for the Saint's foundations and the generosity she showed them, or on account of the celebrity which Melania herself had acquired and the universal veneration in which she was held, Gerontius, as we shall see, occupied a position enjoying considerable prestige amongst the other monks in the Holy Land. Suddenly, an unexpected whirlwind burst over the flourishing churches and monasteries of Palestine, and overwhelmed them in destruction. Melania's foundations did not escape the general ruin, as unfortunately their superior, Gerontius, was one of the principal victims.

The doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon with regard to the heresy of Eutyches was the cause of the disaster. This forms a sad page in Palestinian

History, and is well worthy of elucidation in the light of certain documents only recently discovered.

Upon the termination of the Council of Chalcedon, in November, 451, Theodosius, a monk from Alexandria, who had supported the cause of Eutyches, went to Jerusalem, where, by misrepresenting the meaning of the definitions of the Council, he succeeded in confusing the simple and little cultivated minds of the monks in the Holy Land. He created disturbances amongst the people, who broke out into deplorable excesses. They regarded the Fathers of the Chalcedon Council as contravening the teaching of the Synod of Ephesus, which had condemned the errors of Nestorius. By skilfully fanning the flame, Theodosius managed to create a general revolt against the new decrees of the Council. Very soon this agitation, to which other important causes contributed, produced the gravest results. On Easter Sunday, 452, Theodosius, having driven away Juvenal, the rightful bishop, installed himself in the episcopal seat in the Church at Jerusalem. Juvenal, meanwhile, repaired to Constantinople. The orthodox bishops having been expelled from Palestine, their sees were filled by the adherents of Theodosius. Amongst these was Peter the Iberian, who was appointed to the See of Majuma. All the monastic communities in the province, and the number was very large, together with ten thousand other monks, withdrew from Juvenal, and unanimously submitted to the usurper,



Theodosius, who ruled alone, and held all under his authority. One monastery only, through the means of Saint Euthymius, remained faithful. Saint Euthymius had been correctly informed by his pupil Stephen, Bishop of Jamnia, who had taken part in the Council, of the intention and the real belief of the Fathers. Hence the Saint, with all the monks of his *laura* at Faran, adhered to the Chalcedonian doctrine. With this exception, in a short time, Palestine became the stronghold of Monophysite error.

We cannot doubt the good faith of the greater number of these monks who were deceived by the astute Theodosius. When the Emperor Marcianus asked them to submit to the decrees of Chalcedon, they replied that they certainly condemned the heresy of Eutyches, who maintained that Christ's human nature was wholly absorbed in the Divine; but, on the other hand, they rejected the doctrine of the two natures in Christ. Their intelligence was too uncultivated to enable them to distinguish between person and nature. Hence they maintained that to admit two natures in Christ was tantamount to admitting two persons, and thus reviving the Nestorian heresy. The error of the monks of Palestine was in effect a species of monotheism which must be distinguished from the heresy of Eutyches. Meanwhile, the Pope, Saint Leo, treated the rebels with the utmost benignity. At first he was not accurately informed of their theological position, and hence he called their

resistance *insanam imperitiam monachorum*. Later it came to his knowledge that, through the exertions of some ignorant or malicious person, a false Greek translation of his famous letter to Flavianus, upon which the decrees of the Council were based, had been circulated amongst these monasteries. This translation, by altering his meaning, had been the cause of serious scandal. The Pope, on learning this, addressed a paternal letter to the monks, which was at once doctrinal and admonitory. He hoped to afford them an easy retreat from the false position in which they had placed themselves. But the great Pontiff's apostolic solicitude had not at once the desired effect. In this sad revolt from authority, Gerontius' part was by no means a secondary one. It is easy to perceive that he was regarded as one of the most influential of the cenobites of the Holy Land. As a proof of this, Cyril of Scythopolis relates that the usurper, Theodosius, wished to procure the submission of the only monastery which rejected his submission, namely, that of Euthymius, situated a short distance from Jerusalem. Finding himself unable to secure an interview with Euthymius, he sent an embassy, consisting of Elpidius and Gerontius, of whom one was the successor of the great Passarion, and the other the representative of the Blessed Melania, to dispute with him and to convince him. To be employed on such an errand these two monks must have enjoyed much prestige and authority amongst their brethren. ;

Unfortunately it so happened that whilst Euthymius succeeded in convincing Elpidius of the orthodoxy of the Council of Chalcedon, although he preferred to remain in communion with Theodosius, Gerontius held firmly to his previous opinions, in which he never wavered, until the year 485, when he finally resigned the direction of the monasteries entrusted to him by Saint Melania.

Various causes seem to have contributed to the obstinate resistance of Gerontius. Foremost amongst these was his intense hatred of the Nestorian heresy which he had inherited from Melania. In fact, the Saint, in her burning zeal for the true faith, had exercised, during her life time, a real apostolate in defence of Catholic teaching and against Nestorianism.

It was this ardent defence of the truth which strengthened the bonds of friendship which united Saint Melania to the great champion of the Council of Ephesus, Saint Cyril of Alexandria. When she afterwards visited the court of Constantinople she converted, by her eloquent words, many of the nobility who had been drawn into the heresy of Nestorius. It was impossible that Gerontius, who had been a witness of all this, should not be filled with the same ardent feelings as his saintly benefactress. To this must be added the falsification of the documents of the Fathers which had taken place in Palestine, by means of which the conviction that the

Council of Chalcedon had betrayed the faith as defined by the Council of Ephesus, had taken deep root in the minds of these imperfectly educated ascetics. But there were also two other very definite motives which probably even more strongly urged Gerontius to resistance—his personal relations with the Empress Eudoxia and with Peter the Iberian.

Upon the nature of the influence exerted by these two distinguished personages it does not seem necessary to dwell. It can only be said that the motives which weighed with Gerontius in this obstinate resistance to the decrees of Chalcedon do not seem to have been altogether unworthy. Both the Empress and also Peter the Iberian, whose romantic career shows him to have been a far from ignoble character, had been numbered by Saint Melania amongst her more devoted friends. Peter in particular, like Gerontius himself, had entered one of Melania's monasteries while she was still living, and must presumably have been regarded as her spiritual son. In any case the particulars above rehearsed help to throw light upon the part taken by Gerontius in the revolt of the monks of Palestine. The close friendship existing between him and Peter the Iberian, combined with the great prestige of the latter and his eminent personal gifts, undoubtedly contributed to strengthen both in their obstinate adherence to their opinions. These two souls were dear to Melania's heart. She had received both with a

mother's tender love. What a sorrow for her could she have foreseen their fall! Perhaps it was some prophetic instinct which caused the Saint, when investing Gerontius with the religious habit at the Sepulchre of Our Divine Redeemer, to pour forth such fervent prayers that he might receive the gift of true faith. Alas, through the mysterious obstacles sometimes opposed by the will of man to the action of Divine Grace, the Saint's prayers were ineffectual.

And now in closing this brief account of Melania's biographer, we may invite the reader to peruse the summary, in which we have tried to collect and sift the scattered materials for the life of the Saint herself. It is our earnest wish that this study of fourth century history may succeed in throwing fresh light upon the times in which, and the persons amongst whom she lived.

Melania being the central figure in our narrative, it was meet that we should spare no effort which might tend to throw that figure into greater relief. To this end we have laboured, by tracing the Saint's footsteps throughout the varied events of her career, from her birth amidst the royal splendour of her father's palace to her saintly death close beside the ever-living memories of the Passion of her heavenly Spouse. No example, it seems to us, is likely to prove a more profitable antidote to the spirit of the age in which we live than the story of the splendid renunciation of this noble lady.

# Roman Society in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries.

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## SUMMARY.

THE new life of Saint Melania is a valuable historical document.—Its special importance.—Saint Melania's life is simply the perfect realisation of the Gospel ideal.—The circumstances which influenced that life.—The corruption of Roman society and its reformation in the fourth century.—Condition of Christianity under Constantine and his successor.—The reaction from Paganism.—The overthrow of Polytheism and the final triumph of Christianity.—Melania's first impressions.—Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries.—Insurmountable barriers and distinctions of caste.—The ideal of the Christian ruler according to the Gospel.—This ideal not yet attained by the Emperors.—Absolutism and excessive flattery.—Corruption of the Court.—Depravity of the people.—Wretched condition of the slaves.—Patrician customs.—Insatiable avarice.—Pride and arrogance.—Extravagance and ostentation.—Unbridled sensuality.—Prodigality.—Vices and effeminacy of the army.—The Roman ideal of happiness.—Sad results of this corruption.—Behaviour of the true Christians.—Christianity flourishes in the midst of Roman licentiousness.—Contributory causes.—Monastic asceticism.—The coming of Saint Athanasius awakens religious fervour in Rome.—Devotion to the Roman martyrs.—Pilgrimages to the East.—Earnest study of the Scriptures.—Sojourn of Saint Jerome in Rome, and his instructions to the nobility.—Saint Marcella's school in the Aventine.—Systems of Biblical instruction introduced into Rome by Saint Jerome.—Results, especially with regard to the writings of the Holy Doctor—Great designs of Providence.

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THE fourth century was undoubtedly one of the most glorious periods in the history of Christian

Rome. It was a century of social resurrection. A vigorous Christianity had ingrafted itself upon the old root of the crumbling Roman Empire, and from this germ a new era of civilisation was springing forth. The life of Saint Melania, which has recently for the first time been given to the world in its entirety, contributes a golden page to the ecclesiastical history of those days of the Church's triumph. The learned De Rossi, who was only acquainted with a portion of it, and that a very incorrect portion, does not hesitate to describe it as a "precious historical document." May we be permitted also to call it a gem of purest water, flashing from the august brow of Christian Rome with the light of Gospel simplicity.

What lends special importance to the discovery is the light thrown upon the conversion of the greater part of the Roman aristocracy to the Faith during the fourth century. Up to the present, all the knowledge which we possessed of the great figures of those noble Roman senators, matrons, and maidens, who were in those days illustrious examples of Christian virtue and heroism, was derived from the allusions, more or less summary and incomplete, which are to be found here and there in the letters of Saint Jerome. The Saint, in his own vivacious style, has merely clothed these impressionist outlines in rhetorical language.

On the other hand, the life of the illustrious patrician which has recently been brought to light is a complete biography, the only one which has survived. Its elaborate details are recorded by one who lived for more than thirty-five years upon the closest terms of friendship with the Saint. These details are given with such simplicity of style and such clearness of expression as must charm the most unobservant reader.

The life of Saint Melania, extraordinary as it is in all its aspects, presents to us the practical and uncompromising realisation of the Gospel ideal. As we read this life we cannot avoid being filled with that amazement which overwhelms us when we are brought face to face with incomprehensible effects which exceed the limits of their natural and apparent cause. But in order to have a more intimate knowledge of the causes which contributed, each one in its own degree, to produce the phenomenon of this admirable woman, we must not study merely the gifts of nature and of grace which take the first place in the development of man's life. It is necessary to go further and to take into careful consideration that combination of circumstances and social conditions in which her life was passed, for these constituted, so to speak, the atmosphere she breathed, an atmosphere which, in her case, happily, involved no contamination.

Melania was of illustrious birth, but her highly



privileged soul soared beyond any thought of earthly creatures. From her very childhood she manifested such exalted virtue as caused those around her to regard her as an angel in human form. Of this we are assured by her biographer, who tells us that her soul was wholly angelic, and that from her earliest years she was all on fire with the love of Christ. But we do not need this testimony to be assured of her sanctity. Her life, in every stage of its development, affords us ample and convincing proof of this. It is impossible that such sublimity of thought and such masculine heroism of virtue could germinate spontaneously from nature in a girl so young and so delicate. It is necessary, therefore, to glance, however cursorily, at the peculiar circumstances amidst which, by the dispensation of Providence, those holy and generous impulses had birth and were matured by Divine Grace in this noble maiden's breast, impulses which were to guide her to such an exalted destiny.

Roman society in the fourth century was already in a state of disruption and also of transformation, according to the Aristotelian axiom that the corruption of one state is the generation of another. Whilst, on the one hand, the sun of the old Rome of the Consuls and the Cæsars had set, on the other, the new Rome, regenerated by Christianity, was arising in all the radiant beauty

of youth. Christianity had silently penetrated into the very marrow of the ancient city, and by a process of infiltration and assimilation had absorbed and renewed it, modifying its belief, its worship, and its customs. This work of slow and persevering transformation made ever-increasing progress in the closing years of the fourth century and the beginning of the next. During the same period, the destruction of the old régime progressed in like proportion, shaken as Rome was internally by the corruption of manners, and externally by the invasion of the barbarians.

Thus it was that after Constantine's victory over Maxentius, and the promulgation of the edict of Milan, the Christian religion emerged from the throes of persecution, refreshed and reinvigorated. Obeying the law of contradiction, Paganism waned to its setting, not, indeed, because the recently converted Emperor had, with a stroke of his pen, proscribed the ancient worship which was so deeply rooted in the lives and social customs of the people, but rather from the fact that when the profession of Christianity was sanctioned by the law, a knowledge of the Gospel became more widespread, resulting in the inevitable recognition of the divine seal of its origin, its history, and its works. On the other hand, Paganism, whilst still retaining the character of the official religion, no longer satisfied the needs of the soul, and thus

left a dreary void in hearts naturally sincere.

But, at the same time, it found supporters in a by no means inconsiderable number of the Roman aristocracy, who held tenaciously to the old traditions, to the honours of the magistracy, and to the rich emoluments of the pagan priesthood. Hence came the reaction, provoked both by the growing influence of Christianity and by the favours so lavishly bestowed upon it by Constantine and his nephews, a reaction which, allied to the neo-platonic philosophy and the study of Greek literature, acquired full force under Julian. In the time of his successors these reactionary measures were sometimes kept in check, and sometimes were actively hostile, while again there were intervals of comparative peace. But the struggle was never wholly given up, nor the hope of ultimate victory abandoned.

The final assault on Christianity took place towards the end of the fourth century. It was made by the aristocratic party, headed by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and his son-in-law, Nicomachus Flavianus, both remarkable for their culture and their influence amongst their pagan contemporaries. On this occasion, also, their efforts resulted in their utter discomfiture.

In 382, Gratian ordered the altar and statue of Liberty, which was regarded as the official symbol of the dominant Paganism, to be removed from

the Senate for good and all. Thus, every link with the State having been broken, Paganism was reduced to the condition of a mere private cult. Henceforward the senators were no longer obliged, on entering the Curia, to burn the last grains of incense to the dethroned polytheism. A series of legislative enactments subsequently suppressed the ancient privileges of idolatry. The vestals, the priests, the temples, were deprived of their rich appanages. The Roman patricians, more or less sincere worshippers of the false gods, found themselves bereft of the hereditary honours and wealth of the priesthood. By degrees, they submitted to the growth of Christianity, which spread rapidly in family circles and throughout the city, and everywhere exercised a powerful and salutary influence by raising the hearts of men to the sublime ideals of the Gospel.

The interdict against idolatrous worship, issued by Theodosius the Great (391), gave the final blow to Paganism. The defeat of the tyrant, Eugenius, which followed, involved with it also the downfall of the patrician party, who had joined the usurper. Thus the Gospel became the only law, civil and political, throughout the Empire.

In the year 403, Saint Jerome wrote:—"The Capitol, once dazzling with gold, behold it now sunk in squalor; soot and cobwebs cover every

temple in Rome. The city totters to its foundations, and crowds of people pass by the ruined temples, flocking to the tombs of the martyrs."

Meanwhile, Christianity was singing her song of triumph, and with her faith in Christ the Lord rendered stronger and more resolute than ever by the long-continued struggle, was entering upon a glorious period of her history, when Melania's clear and vigorous intellect received its first impressions of the Eternal City. The Saint was born in 383, and remained in Rome until the year 408. To such a chosen soul, and one so imbued from infancy with Christian ideas, how distressing must have been the loathesome state of that society in whose bosom she first drew breath! Nor was it only in the inevitable contact with the pagan world that this contrast was thus painfully forced upon her, but in her daily intercourse with the Christian community itself. The methods adopted by various emperors, after Constantine, to attract the Pagans to the new religion, had resulted in sowing the seeds of corruption among the Christians as well. Many of the Pagans became Christians from motives of worldly interest, without any serious call or preparation. Hence, whilst externally professing the Christian faith, they continued to practise the customs, the manners, and the maxims of the Pagans.

The picture of Rome, drawn with marvellous

unanimity by contemporary writers, both Christian and pagan, of the fourth and fifth centuries, reveals the city in an incredible state of senile decay and of corruption, yet, at the same time, manifesting an arrogance which knew no restraint. The various classes of society were separated by insurmountable barriers and distinctions of caste—imperial, patrician, and plebeian. Never could those in these several states conceive themselves bound by any common tie. We make no mention of the slaves who were relegated to an infinite distance from all human society. How different this from the Christian idea of universal brotherhood!

St. Augustine, in his *De Civitate Dei*, set before the wearer of the imperial diadem in those days, the manner in which he should discharge his office as a Christian ruler according to the Gospel ideal. He must govern with justice; amidst all the honour paid to him and the exaggerated and servile adulation by which he was surrounded, he must ever remember that he was only man; he should continually repeat to himself that he held his power from God, and make it subservient to Him in all things; he must fear, love and reverence God, preferring the Kingdom of Heaven to that of earth; he should be slow to punish, and only do so from the exigences of the public welfare, and not from vindictive motives; he should pardon easily, but at the same time,

not so as to afford impunity to crime, but rather from the hope of the offender's amendment ; he should alleviate the sufferings of the condemned by clemency and liberal kindness ; he should the more strictly curb sensuality that his position would afford him greater opportunities for indulgence ; he should govern himself, before all others, so as to subdue all cupidity. All these things he should do, not from vain-glorious motives, but from a desire for eternal happiness. Moreover, he should not neglect to offer to God the sacrifice of humility, of mercy, and of prayer for forgiveness of his own sins. What a sublime conception of the sovereign ruler according to God's own heart !

Although the supreme power had passed into the hands of Christian princes, yet no radical change had taken place therein. The same pagan absolutism sat upon the throne surrounded by the same adulation as in former days. The emperors of the fourth century, although Christians, did not renounce the pagan dignity of supreme pontiff (*summus pontifex*), as the prerogative of supreme power. Gratian was the first to refuse the insignia, but even he retained the title.\* Just as in the days of Domitian, of Caligula, of Diocletian,

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\* See Zosimus, IV., 36 ; Labastie : *Mémoire sur le souverain pontificat des empereurs romains*, in the *Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions*, t. xv., p. 100.

who arrogated to themselves divine rights, so it was still said of Constantine that he was a visible deity of eternally divine origin, and that his rescripts were celestial and worthy of adoration. It was affirmed of Valentinian that all his published edicts bore the signature of the divinity, in other words his own, whilst it was said of Gratian that he was *Deo proximus humanarum rerum dominus*, and that he was everywhere present, and of Theodosius that he was a visible deity who had come from Spain, that he shared in the divinity, *cum Deo consors*, that all people adored him, and that the happiness of mankind depended on him. To him sailors owed fine weather, travellers their safe return, and combatants their success in arms. Symmachus was surprised that Valentinian and Gratian did not receive greater worship than that paid to the gods. Even talent was regarded as a divine gift coming from Cæsar :

Non habeo ingenium, Cæsar sed jussit habebō

Non tutum renuisse Deo.

Such were the exaggerations and the gross flatteries wherewith that decrepit and effete society fed itself. It was the Church who frequently addressed the Cæsars thus deified, reminding them of the limitations of their power before God and in the eyes of the Christians. Hosius, Athanasius, Liberius, Eusebius of Vercelli, Lucifer of Cagliari,



Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, each and all addressed the rulers in language such as had not been heard for ages, the language of truth which opposed to the will of man the Law of Divine Justice.

What shall we say of the Court? It was composed of an infinite number of officials of every rank and class, who were sunk in all the softness of Asiatic luxury. To an elaborate and detailed ceremonial they had superadded the manners and institutions of the East. It is not, therefore, surprising that the court had become a hot bed of corruption, where flattery, cupidity, calumny and intrigue were often the means of leading even good rulers into excesses of incredible weakness and cruelty. We must bear in mind that, in the opinion of contemporary writers, the greater number of the courtiers openly countenanced every kind of vice, and that their depravity and greed corrupted public morals. On the other hand, the Roman people, as if wearied of their glorious past, had fallen into the languid and ease-loving ways of old age. The efforts of the Church to induce men to live as brothers, to alleviate misery, to wipe out the disgrace of Paganism, and to preach that any reformation of society must be based on humility, charity, and self-denial, were often powerless before the apathy of those to whom she appealed.

Thus it was that Rome fostered the depravity

of the people, and directly maintained the insurmountable barrier between the patricians and the plebeians, while, at the same time, the most sublime virtues springing from the doctrine of the Gospel flourished in her midst. Disorderly crowds of slaves and eunuchs, remnants of Oriental barbarism, thronged not only the imperial court, but also the palaces of the wealthy Romans and the streets and market-places of the city. Plebeians of the lowest class, who were mostly homeless outcasts, habitually spent their days in idleness, drink, gambling, begging, and brawling. No right was so much prized as that of attending the public spectacles at the expense of the State or of the patricians, and it was the only right which they would never for any consideration forego. Therefore, wherever the public shows were fewer in number, or there occurred any scarcity of food, riots of an alarming character infallibly ensued. The Roman prefects never suffered so much ill-treatment at the hands of the plebeians as during the fourth and fifth centuries, when it rarely happened that a prefect passed through his term of office without some popular disturbance. At the same time the number of poor in the city was enormous, and they congregated chiefly in the Vatican quarter. Such poverty is a convincing proof that moral license does not conduce to a people's prosperity.

Meanwhile, the slaves, those outlaws from civil life and natural freedom, multiplied apace. Whether by reason of the great existing misery which drove even freemen into servitude to till the ground and to colonise the vast possessions of the wealthy, or owing to the invasion of the barbarian conquerors, an incredible number of these unhappy beings were owned by every great family as mere goods and chattels. The resources of the vast estates cultivated by these slaves were drained to the last degree to enable the owners to live in luxury. To such an extent was this carried that the slaves would sometimes have died of hunger if the merciful hand of the Church had not come to their aid. Crowds of human beings were daily to be seen in the forum, lying on the mats, naked and benumbed with cold, their tearful, languishing glances imploring the kindness of speedy purchase, which would after all only result in fresh ill-treatment. Life held nothing for them; they must submit to see their daughters torn from them and forced to become the slaves of vice, their very lives even were at the mercy of their powerful masters.

Of the nobles and wealthy patricians it may be said briefly that their time was wholly devoted to pleasure, to the seeking for honours and magisterial dignities, the accumulation of riches, and the excessive increase of their estates, espe-

cially in those provinces of which they were appointed governors. The maxims of Epictetus, which accorded with the fashion of the times, were held in supreme estimation. A great number, whilst disbelieving in the divinity of their deities, were addicted to degrading superstitions. They practised magic, studied the occult sciences, and were worshippers of Mithras, a cult then very much in fashion. The popular thirst for amusement was insatiable. Public games, the amphitheatre, the circus, spectacles of every kind, constituted the daily routine, and were the seminaries of every vice. The riotous life of the city, wholly devoted to pleasure, stifled all noble and honourable sentiment.

A cold and calculating selfishness took the place of honourable friendship, and set a premium on intimacy with gamblers and libertines. Slander was unrestrained, and the purest and most innocent could not escape its venomous tongue. Anonymous denunciations were of constant occurrence. A law made by Constantine in 325 testifies to the enormity of the evil, and the impossibility of remedying it. Witchcraft was practised secretly by many. The processes instituted under Valentinus by Maxentius against a number of senators and noble matrons for suspected witchcraft and other capital crimes are famous in history, notwithstanding the cruelty

employed. There is also the well-known episode of the noble youth, Lollius, son of the ex-prefect Lampadius, who, whilst still a beardless boy, was exiled, and finally put to death by the executioner's axe for having merely copied a book on witchcraft, *codicem noxiarum artium*.

But the really gangrenous ulcer of this Roman society so nigh to dissolution was the insatiable avarice which pervaded all classes, but which in particular was the ruling passion of those who held the chief offices of the state. The rapacity and venality of high officials obtained such widespread notoriety, and these vices had become so common and familiar at that time as to excite no scruple whatever. Usury and tyranny in dealing with the poor and helpless were carried to the utmost pitch of cruelty. A poor debtor, unable to pay his debts, would be forced to sell his children, if indeed, starvation had not already compelled him to do so. The usurers of that time resorted to such inhuman methods as impounding corpses and preventing their burial. No wonder that such scenes should cause Saint Ambrose, that model bishop and magistrate, to shed bitter tears.

Barbarous cruelties were practised by the Treasury officials. It was almost impossible to satisfy the extortionate demands of the public exchequer. Those who were unable to pay the

taxes were thrown into prison, where they and their wives were cruelly scourged, whilst their children were sold into slavery. Wherefore Orosius could indeed with good reason assert that it was by no means unusual to find Romans who preferred freedom and poverty amongst barbarous nations to the anguish of a life tortured by the exactions of Rome. Add to this a certain pretentious arrogance, which wrapped the Roman patrician round from the cradle to the grave. At his birth he received an outlandish string of names belonging to remote antiquity, thus recalling the family glories of the past. This custom was so universal as to be observed even in Christian families. It was carried to such a pitch that more than seven surnames were assumed, preferably in Greek, for as Ausonius tells us, the aping of Greek culture was a favourite affectation of the time. "*Nam gloriosum Graeculus nomen putat quod sermo fucat doricus.*" The great ambition of men of letters and of magistrates, even those of mediocre ability, was to have statues erected to them as a means of immortalising themselves. This was an honour lavishly bestowed by the rulers, the senate, the cities and municipalities. When they died, prolix and bombastic epitaphs were engraven on their tombs, commemorating such peerless gifts and virtues as would leave the owners of

these endowments unequalled amongst men.

Unbridled love of pleasure, luxury, pomp and pride : such were the chief factors in the life of the Roman patrician. To lead an honest, humble life was held to be the mark of either meanness or stupidity. Hence the profusion of palaces and villas rivalling even imperial magnificence. Spacious vestibules adorned with a dazzling wealth of gilding, columns of precious marbles, pavements in mosaic of the most intricate design, gorgeous private basilicas, hippodromes, piazzas, fountains, baths, temples : such was the bewildering sight which met the eyes of the astonished stranger, to whom the great houses and villas of the patricians presented the appearance of miniature towns. The orator Symmachus, who, according to Olimpiodorus, had relatively but a modest income, possessed three magnificent palaces in Rome, as well as fifteen villas to which he could betake himself whenever he needed change.

The furniture too, *deliciarum suppellex*, corresponded with the magnificence of these delightful palaces. Gold, silver, ivory, bronzes, marbles, and rare stones of every kind, statues, candelabra, vases, richly dressed pages, exquisite robes, carpets upon which historical figures were represented : all that the most refined, luxurious taste could conceive was gathered within those walls.

No material but the costliest silk, brocade, or purple cloth heavily embroidered in gold, was considered fit for a matron's wear. But it was when travelling that the senatorial families surpassed themselves in the splendour of their silken garments, and in their gilded chariots and gorgeous equipages with the costliest trappings. Even the men, forgetting the simplicity of ancient times which was satisfied with the woollen toga, and unmindful of the prohibition of Titus, affected silken garments. The fluttering *lacernae*, the *trabea*, and the *palmatae* were all richly embroidered with gold. The presses, filled with robes of every description, allowed the Roman matrons, their owners, to change their dresses daily, and afforded ample means for the indulgence of inordinate vanity. Even young girls wore robes stiff with the richest embroidery, whilst their heads were covered with veils of transparent texture shimmering with gold, or of the finest Egyptian linen with purple and gold lace. Gems of dazzling splendour, and golden ornaments, often representing the value of whole estates, hung from the lacerated ears of matrons and marriageable girls, whilst the same costly gems adorned their heads, their necks, their arms, even their girdles and shoes.

The feminine passion for the acquisition of rich garments and rare jewels amounted almost to a



mania. Husbands and fathers beggared themselves rather than cause their wives and daughters one sigh of ungratified desire.\* Under such circumstances it was not altogether surprising that Ataulfus should offer, with other presents, to Placidia, as a wedding gift, fifty beautiful youths, each carrying two large vases filled with precious stones of priceless value, a small sample of the booty which the Goths carried off from the houses of the Roman patricians.

The Roman matrons, in addition to their passion for dress, were consumed with the desire to appear beautiful. The art of improving nature was their unceasing study. They painted and enamelled their faces, darkened their eyebrows with black antimony, and dyed their hair golden colour. They supplemented their own tresses with false hair, the whole being adorned with gold and flashing jewels. The softest feather beds formed couches too hard for them to recline upon. Every day they spent long hours at the baths, and were anointed with perfumed salves. Their chief occupations consisted in the interchange of visits, during which they mutually slandered and calumniated one another. They appeared in public in gilded litters, and

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\* *Life of Melania*, ch. 36. When the tomb of the Empress Maria, wife of Honorius, in the Vatican, was opened in the sixteenth century, the gold with which her robes were embroidered was found to weigh thirty-seven pounds. This will give an idea of the richness of the gold embroidery used in those days.

surrounded with an ostentatious pomp which seems almost incredible. An interminable crowd of slaves, footmen, valets, and eunuchs formed their escort.

The *thermae*, or public baths, were the scenes of such wild license and debauchery that decency forbids us to dwell upon it. Every day a crowd of clients and parasites gathered inside the colonnades which surrounded the atrium in the houses of the patricians, and here they ingratiated themselves with their patrons by a judicious admixture of slander and flattery. The continual and interminable banquets, which were rather displays of wealth and voluptuousness than of elegance and good taste, can only be described as orgies. They were, indeed, far removed from the *casta convivium* with *bellaria et nuges* imagined by the genial grammarian Macrobius, at which the noblest and most cultured men of that time were to recreate after learned discussions. To soothe patrician ears, music was not wanting at these banquets, there being in existence a large number of ancient musical instruments, whilst new ones were constantly invented. A crowd of singers and mimes were always in attendance at the palaces of the nobles, that they might, by the practice of their art, revive and flatter the jaded senses which idleness and debauchery had dulled.

Very few of the patricians cared for anything

requiring serious thought, and, for the most part, their libraries were as deserted as the graveyard. Men of culture and taste fell into bad repute. People avoided them as bores, and accounted their presence of evil augury. Adultery, infanticide, and divorce were the natural but terrible results of the unbridled licentiousness which reigned in patrician households. It would have been impossible to form an idea of the extreme length to which this corruption extended if a law passed in the year 390 had not lifted a corner of the veil. Not less remarkable was the wanton extravagance which everywhere prevailed. The patricians were enormously wealthy. Although the Goths only held the city for three days, still during that short time enormous riches fell into their hands. This great wealth of the Roman aristocracy was chiefly spent by them in idle display and sensual indulgence. The profuse extravagance indulged in by the nobles for the gratification of their vanity and love of ostentation amounted almost to insanity. Well might St. Augustine declaim against the "*gloriosa effusionis insania*" which was the curse of the age.

We may take an illustration from the expenditure which was expected of the great senatorial families when any one of their members entered upon office as consul, prætor, or quæstor. The vast sums which, in the efforts to win popular favour, were disbursed upon horses, wild beasts, games,

pageants, and presents, would hardly be credited. When Olibrius was made prætor, Probus, according to the account of Olympiodorus, expended the value of 1,200 pounds weight of gold—say £47,000 sterling. Symmachus, for his son Quintus Fabius Maximus, paid 2,000 pounds of gold, or £78,000 sterling; and when a festival, lasting seven days, was celebrated by Maximus in honour of his son's entry upon office as prætor, it cost him the double of this, or something near £156,000. It was a mad contest of prodigality, in which the favour of the people was the prize of the highest bidder.

The contagion of the sensuality and vice within the city had naturally spread to the army. Discipline was no longer observed; the soldiers, forgetting that in former days the austerity of the Roman army had constituted its strength, amused themselves with effeminate songs and diversions. They who once were content to find repose on the bare ground, now required soft feather beds and marble dwellings. They refused to use humble vessels of earthenware, and were not ashamed to drink from enormous goblets which were heavier than their own swords. From the time of Gratian the Roman soldiers would no longer endure the weight of helmet and cuirass, and gave themselves up to drunkenness and orgies of every kind. St. Ambrose vividly describes

the repulsive spectacle of the officers, arrayed in resplendent attire of silk and gold, challenging one another, amid scenes of inconceivable debauchery, to prove which could drink the most wine, with the result that at the end, all alike lay drunk on the ground. It is not surprising that such excesses bred insubordination and license, and by breaking the bonds of discipline, paved the way for the ultimate triumph of the barbarian invaders.

From this state of affairs, we can well understand with what truth St. Augustine, at the dismal sight of the capital of the empire perishing under the blows inflicted on the one hand by corruption, and on the other by the barbarians, traced with his master hand, in these characteristic touches, the ideal of happiness to which the Romans of his time aspired. It mattered nothing that the State was sunk in vice, provided that they were surrounded by abundance, that their arms were victorious, and peace secure. It was of far greater import that each one should amass enormous riches that he might squander them in the pursuit of pleasure. The poor man gave his services to the rich for the sake of having plenty to eat and a quiet, idle life under powerful patronage. The rich took advantage of the poor man's need to surround themselves with courtiers and ministers to their pride. The populace bestowed

their applause, not upon him who considered their true welfare, but upon him who most lavishly provided them with diversion. There must be no severe laws, no restraint on licentiousness. The rulers' whole anxiety was centred upon the submissive temper of their subjects ; whether they were virtuous or vicious mattered nothing. The provinces obeyed the governors, not as the custodians of public morality, but as rulers over all and the purveyors of their pleasures. They rendered them unwilling homage, and feared them with servile fear. The laws seemed framed only for the protection of property, not from any care of good morals. The opportunities for debauchery were brought to the doors of all. Gambling, drunkenness, disgraceful and cruel diversions were indulged in and openly justified. The man for whom these things had no relish was regarded as a public enemy. If anyone should seek to interfere with this reign of license he was to be silenced, to be ostracised, and, if necessary, to be made away with.

Such depravity was inevitably the precursor of disaster ; and, indeed, the barbarian Alaric, with his army, had already reached the gates of Rome, which was plunged into terror at his approach. Then paganism, deaf to the voice of the Gospel, or even attributing to it the coming of these misfortunes, appealed to its own divinities for deliver-

ance, returning to its superstitious lustrations and the sacrifices of pagan worship, while at the same time the public depravity continued as great as ever. The horrors of that time can scarcely be described. The proud Goth had stricken the city to the dust, giving it up to fire and pillage. Rome was deluged with the blood of her citizens, whilst her women were outraged and dishonoured. Now for the first time in Roman history patricians and plebeians were united by the common bond of terror, and the strange sight was seen of Christians and pagans seeking refuge under the shadow of the basilicas of the Apostles, and imploring mercy. But scarcely had the fugitives set foot on safe and hospitable ground, though the ruins of their own city were still smoking with the fires not yet completely extinguished, when they demanded the disgraceful diversions of the theatre, and plunged into greater dissipations than ever. The calamities and the multiplied sufferings of the barbarian invasion were of no avail to regenerate a society so completely given over to corruption. Contemporary writers do not exaggerate in any way when they unanimously declare that Roman morals in the fourth century and at the beginning of the fifth were not only depraved and vicious, but wholly incurable—*perditissimi mores, colluvies morum pessimorum, labes insanabilem flagitiorum*. They are also agreed that

the barbarian oppressor was the instrument chosen by Providence to scourge the pride, the vanity, and the depravity of the corrupt capital of the empire.\*

It is not surprising, having regard to the depths of moral degradation to which ancient Rome had sunk, that good Christians should have shunned all intercourse with the patrician houses. We read of Marcella, the glory of Roman matrons, that she generally abstained from visiting at noble houses in order that her eyes might not be offended with the sight of objects which deserved to be trampled under foot. Saint Jerome, in general terms, directed patrician Christian maidens to avoid the houses of the nobles and to cultivate no intimacy with married women. And he also expressly desired that they should fly, as from the plague, from the company of those virgins and widows who, while ostensibly leading devout lives, frequented the society of matrons who were devoid of all sense of modesty. Thus it was that chosen souls who realized that they were created for a higher destiny than the gratification of sense were disgusted and sickened by the atmosphere of vice

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\* Ten years after the devastation of Rome by Alaric, Claudius Marius Victor wrote :

“ Nil hostis, nil dira fames, nil denique morbi  
Egerunt ; fuimus qui nunc sumus, hisque periclis  
Tentati nihilo meliores reddimur unquam  
Sub vitiis nullo culparum fine manentes.”—

*De perversis suae aetatis moribus*, v. 30-33.



which surrounded them. Like prisoners incarcerated in dark and noisome dungeons, they longed to get away from Rome that they might breathe a purer air. Saint Jerome's powerful voice resounded in their ears, calling on his friends to go forth from the corruptions of Babylon, as he designated the pagan portion of the city. They heard the sighs of Melania, who but recently returned from Jerusalem, counted every moment of her sojourn in the seat of all these iniquities and feverishly hastened the time of her departure. They heard also the mournful accents of Saint Paulinus, who, whilst longing to behold once more his friend Rufinus, yet considered that he should keep far from him on account of his proximity to the same corrupt city. And yet we shall only speak truth when we say that amidst the universal depravity of this pagan Babylon there existed and flourished at the same time the Kingdom of God.

Towards the end of the year 397, St. Jerome declared that Rome possessed what the world in the past was ignorant of—the very flower of Christianity. We learn from Saint Augustine that at the time of Alaric's invasion (410) the number of the Faithful then living in the ancient capital of the Empire was very large. Hence St. Paulinus of Nola, writing to Severus in the year 402, declared that the adherents of the daughter

of Sion in Rome outnumbered those of the daughter of Babylon. If we try to understand the chief causes which, in the very centre of corruption, contributed to foster among the more right-thinking of the Roman patricians that fervent faith and sanctity of life which distinctively marked those times, we shall find that several influences were concurrently at work, all leading in the same direction. There was first the abhorrence of the degraded society in the midst of which they lived, with the consequent tendency to segregation, to monasticism, and to that life of virginal chastity to which so many matrons and young girls devoted themselves. Again, we have many conspicuous examples of sublime virtue afforded by that state of life which were themselves strong incentives to emulation. So, too, we must count the devotion to the martyrs whose graves, invested with a halo of glory, inspired glowing faith and heroic aspirations, whilst, finally, something was due to the pilgrimages to the holy places, and to the earnest and assiduous study of the Sacred Scriptures. From all these sources there emanated fiery sparks which enkindled in the souls of many patricians the glowing flames of Christian piety, and which led them in the end to make public profession of a higher life.

After the terrible persecution of Diocletian, and during the peace which the Church enjoyed under

Constantine, monasticism had marvellously developed in the East. Numbers of Christians, witnesses of the heroism of so many martyrs who were tortured and put to death by their cruel persecutors, were thereby drawn to lead lives of such penitential fervour as approximated to martyrdom. The extraordinary sanctity of these lives attracted others to follow their example. Hence it was that in the space of sixty or seventy years the vast region of Egypt was covered with monasteries whose inmates were venerated for their exceptional holiness. Mount Nitria contained five thousand monks; a great number also dwelt in the place named Scete, and the so-called Cellia were covered with innumerable cells, the abodes of anchorites. A multitude of cenobites, whose lives were consecrated to solitude, prayer, and labour, dwelt in all the countries which extended from Memphis to Babylon. Monasteries were continually springing up in the vicinity of the Nile. The celebrated Serapion was head of nearly ten thousand monks, as were also Pacomius and Paphnutius in the little island of Sabenna. The city of Oxyrhincus in the Thebaid was thronged with monks and celibates, who occupied the public buildings and the ancient pagan temples. When we call to mind the sentiments regarding martyrdom which animated all Egypt, the repulsive sensuality of life, especially pagan

life in Alexandria and other cities, the desire of many to make reparation by severe penance for their sins, as well as the prestige which attached to those venerable solitaries, the fame of whose supernatural lives and virtues had spread everywhere, we can easily understand the eagerness with which people hastened from all parts to visit abodes of peace and sanctity such as had never been seen before. Thus it was that during the latter end of the fourth century Egypt, beyond all other countries, chiefly aroused the admiration of Christendom and kept alight the torch of Religion. It resembled a huge monastery, with Syria and Palestine as offshoots. Meanwhile the fame of Eastern monasticism had already spread to the West, where it aroused not only admiration but also a desire to see those abodes of angelic virtue. Saint Jerome, Rufinus, Sylvia of Aquitaine, or, as others would have it, the Iberian lady Ætheria, Sulpicius Severus, and many other illustrious personages, together with noble Roman matrons, such as the elder Melania, Paula, Eustochium, and Fabiola, hastened eagerly to visit the homes of this new asceticism and to converse with the ascetics themselves.

Towards the middle of the fourth century Saint Athanasius, flying from the persecutions of the Arians, sought refuge in Rome. There, during his sojourn in 341 and the following years, he

succeeded in inspiring many of the nobility with a desire for the ascetic life and the profession of virginity. Marcella, who had been left a widow in the very flower of her youth, only seven months after her marriage, became the most devoted client of the illustrious Bishop of Alexandria, venerated at that time by the whole Catholic world as the strong pillar of orthodoxy. Under such a master Marcella soon came to play a leading part in the revival of asceticism amongst the Roman patricians. Athanasius recounted the story of the wonderful life of Antony, then still living, to whose sanctity and fame even the great Constantine had paid homage. Coming upon such authority, the strange history of the Patriarch of Eastern monasticism was as a flame which set the more exalted souls on fire. The lesson was not lost, and henceforth they turned to evangelical perfection as the one remedy for the terrible desolation occasioned by the corruption of the age.

A fresh impetus was given later to these initial desires by the reading of the no less wonderful and edifying life of Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours. Souls who longed to soar above the unwholesome atmosphere which surrounded them into purer and more exalted regions, found themselves powerfully urged to the imitation of such models. Then it was that the Roman nobility became conspicuous for the resplendent examples of virtue

amongst its members. At the same time, such example, given by personages remarkable for birth, wealth, and culture, whilst arousing admiration in some, excited in others only feelings of contempt. These latter, the champions of the age and its morals, felt vaguely that such virtue condemned the ostentation and sensuality of their own lives, which were spent in the pursuit of honours and in wanton indulgence.

The illustrious senators, Furius Pammachius, Pontius Paulinus, Turcius Apronianus, and Macarius, the vicar of Rome, were amongst the nobles who were converted to a truly ascetic life of penance, humility, and charity. Conspicuous amongst the matrons of the highest rank were Marcella, the elder Melania, Paula, Lea, Avita, Blesilla, Paulina, Furia, Fabiola, who, together with the fairest flowers of Roman maidenhood, Axella, Eustochium, with her niece Paula, Principia, Marcellina, Eunomia, Demetrias, and others, afforded the most striking contrast between the purity and humility of Christian life and the pride and corruption of Roman society. Their part was that of the mirror, reflecting everywhere a brilliant light, which proved a perpetual incentive to virtue.

At the same time, devotion to the martyrs, whose tombs extended for three miles round the walls of the Eternal City, reached its climax in the second

half of the fourth century, particularly during the pontificate of Damasus, to whom the cultus of the martyrs was specially dear. From those sacred tombs, enclosed within the walls of magnificent basilicas, and adorned with marble, encased in gold and silver, perfumed with incense and balsams, illumined by the mystic light of tapers and lamps, and overshadowed by the symbolic mosaics of the sanctuary, there breathed in all the fulness of its power the good odour of Christ, and there was revealed in all its grandeur the heroism which is the fruit of the Gospel. The concourse of people at these tombs was enormous, especially on the martyrs' anniversaries; and the solemnity of the ceremonial at these sacred spots, so deeply venerated, was such as to seem a reflection of that heavenly glory which surrounded their beatified souls. To these holy shrines the patricians, with their families, were amongst the first to hasten, and here the consuls, themselves the representatives of the proudest and most exalted worldly dignity, paid homage to the power of virtue by the lowering of their *fascēs*.

Noble Roman matrons mingled with the crowds of devout plebeians who kept the nightly vigils which preceded the martyrs' festivals. Young girls who had resolved to consecrate themselves to God, and who hence avoided appearing in public, might be seen there pouring forth their souls in

prayer during the quiet hours, when the throngs of pious worshippers had withdrawn. Thus it is easy to understand how powerful was the influence of the Roman martyrs over the patrician classes, and especially over those souls whom Divine Grace was already urging to high ordeals or even to the pitch of heroism.

Amongst the other incentives to fervour must be reckoned the pilgrimages to the East, which were so general in Rome during the latter end of the fourth century. Veneration for the Holy Places of Palestine was the chief motive of these pilgrimages, together with the desire of imprinting on the memory a vivid recollection of the Bible narrative, and also of visiting those centres of sanctity and religious life for which the monasteries of Egypt in particular were celebrated. None were so strongly inflamed with this pious ardour as the noble matrons of Rome. Hence we find the elder Melania, grandmother of our Saint, who was left a widow at twenty-two years of age, amongst the first to raise the standard of the Cross. To the grief of her relatives, and the amazement of the whole city, she separated from her little son, her only child, and consecrated herself to a life of penance and recollection in a monastery in Jerusalem.

Later on, others, equally noble and equally illustrious, followed her example. Saint Paula, the



widow of Toxotius, accompanied by a young girl, Julia Eustochium, explored Palestine and visited the monasteries of Egypt. She finally took up her abode near the sacred grotto of Bethlehem, where she founded monasteries, and where she died. Her tomb there was much honoured. Shortly after her departure from Rome she had been joined by Fabiola, the heiress of Fabius Maximus. This noble lady, by her public penance for faults committed in her youth, was a shining example to those Romans who had grown old in vice. She led for a considerable time the life of an ascetic in Bethlehem, until she was recalled by pressing affairs to Rome, which she again edified on her return by her humility and her benefactions.

The last of this noble band was the younger Paula, the daughter of Laeta. She also belonged to the Julian *gens*, and going to the East after her grandmother's death, she set a rare example of virginal purity. The letters which these holy women wrote to their friends and relatives, in which they vividly described the peace and happiness of their life, and the odour of sanctity which breathed from all around them, were so many incentives to others to follow their example. They could not fail to exercise a powerful influence upon the higher classes of Roman society.

The earnest study of the Holy Scriptures is closely connected with the pilgrimage to Palestine.

It would be going beyond the limits of our subject to discuss the general movement which, in the fourth century, led the greatest luminaries of the Church to the unceasing study and exposition of the sacred books. The East, with its schools of Alexandria and Antioch, as well as the West, with its principal Doctors, Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, and Hilary, reveal to us how keen was the desire in those days to search into the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures, and what efforts were made by the Fathers of the Church to spread a knowledge of them amongst the people. Confining ourselves exclusively to Rome, and in particular to the Roman aristocracy, we can assert in all truth that such serious study, and such burning ardour for Biblical research, was never known as during the close of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, especially amongst women and girls. This is one of the most marked characteristics of the period. At that epoch, indeed, there was good reason to condemn the corrupt manners and the vain display of the Roman aristocracy ; but, at the same time, a large portion of Christian Rome continued to preserve that robust faith which the Apostle of the Gentiles once praised. The Holy Scriptures were regarded as the Word of God, which contained the Divine oracles, the laws given to man as his safe-conduct to eternal happiness. It was the unfailing nourish-

ment of Christian virtue, the certain guide to perfection, support and comfort in the misfortunes of life and amid the dangerous hurricanes of the world. As we may notice in the early paintings in the Catacombs, the artists drew most of their inspiration from the Bible. Scenes from the Old and the New Testament were depicted in the adornment of the Basilicas. In the sculpture of the Sarcophagi the changes were rung upon a limited cycle of Biblical themes, and Christian poets took their subjects, as the Fathers of the Church did their treatises, from the suggestions supplied by Holy Scripture.

But these Biblical studies reached a climax when Rome enthusiastically welcomed within its walls, and admitted to the rights of citizenship, the Dalmatian priest, Jerome, the son of Eusebius. He had come to Rome with Paulinus, Bishop of Antioch, and Epiphanius of Salamis in the island of Cyprus, when important ecclesiastical business rendered it necessary for these prelates to confer with the Pontiff St. Damasus. Jerome, who then began to assist the Pope in his correspondence with the Eastern Church, was the guest of the noble matron Paula. It was during this time that he became more widely known and appreciated as an eloquent and learned writer, deeply versed in the exegesis of the Sacred Scriptures. His learning, his piety, and his stern virtue ren-

dered him in a short time the object of general and enthusiastic veneration. His sojourn in Rome, although of short duration (382-385), was a veritable apostolate, which left a deep and lasting impression, more especially upon the patricians.

From his youth, Jerome had conceived an intense love for the Sacred Scriptures. As the years advanced he made immense progress, and his more developed intelligence, his researches, his travels in the East, his acquaintance with the dialects, his hearing of the best masters, such as Gregory of Nazianzum, in Constantinople, and Didymus at Alexandria, all these things had contributed to make him, beyond any of his contemporaries, a consummate master of Biblical science. Before long his acknowledged ability caused him to be regarded as the oracle of the Christian faith. Meanwhile he was in perpetual request in Rome, not only with the Pope and with scholars like Pammachius and the venerated Domnio, but also with noble matrons and virgins, who longed to receive from him that divine instruction which he knew so well how to impart with profit and unction. Although his humility made him reluctant to do so, Paula, by dint of importunity, induced him to give an entire course of conferences on the Old and the New Testament to herself and her little daughter, Eustochium. In course of time, the illustrious Marcella, who was regarded as the chief ornament

of the Roman aristocracy, *Romanæ urbis inclytum decus*, formed a regular school of Biblical studies in her palace on the Aventine. This became a centre of attraction for the flower of the nobility who were aspiring to Christian perfection. St. Jerome tells us that this devout matron, who was filled with faith and gifted with more than ordinary talent, had an almost incredible ardour for the study of the Sacred Scriptures: *Divinarum Scripturarum ardor erat incredibilis*. She was already the devoted client of the illustrious Athanasius when, in 382, she became acquainted with Jerome's rare virtue and learning. She succeeded by unceasing importunity in obtaining his consent to become her guide and master in her chosen study. The most distinguished women, both girls and matrons, of Rome's aristocracy were amongst Marcella's assiduous pupils. Paula, who was united to her in the closest bonds of friendship, could not be separated from her. Thus her little daughter, Eustochium, was trained, in the house on the Aventine, to a life of virginity, and there learned to relish the sweetness of the Sacred Scriptures. This princess, a daughter of the most illustrious of senators, lived with Marcella, and under her tuition made steady and remarkable progress. Marcella's house was the central library where everyone could obtain copies of the Bible and the works of the most famous ecclesi-

astical writers, amongst which those from the pen of St. Jerome were specially prized.

It may be said with truth that Saint Jerome not only assisted in the establishment of a school in Rome for the instruction of the patricians in the Holy Scriptures, but that he also introduced a system of Biblical teaching for young girls, for youths, and for consecrated virgins and widows. He wished that girls should be taught from infancy to learn the names of the series of Prophets, Patriarchs, and Apostles, and that they should also commit the Psalms to memory. To make this work attractive to them he advised the giving of little prizes. As they grew older he recommended a study of the Proverbs of Solomon to help them to live wisely, and of Ecclesiastes, that they might estimate worldly vanity at its proper value ; then the Book of Job, from which they might learn lessons of patience in the troubles of life. Finally, he would have them pass to the study of the Gospels, a study which should henceforth be unceasing, and also of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. With advancing years and increasing understanding they were to set to work upon the Pentateuch, the Books of Kings, of Paralipomenon, Esdras, and Esther ; and, lastly, when there was no risk of misunderstanding the mystical and spiritual meaning, the Canticle of Canticles. For adults he prescribed, in addition

to daily and persevering study of the Scriptures, the reading of the Commentaries of the Fathers.

Under St. Jerome's fostering care this movement developed rapidly and produced marvellous results. The great Doctor of the Church himself testifies to the profound knowledge of the Bible which several of the Roman matrons and young girls possessed. His praise might almost seem exaggerated if it were not justified by the proofs which he gives. Saint Paula was perfectly acquainted with the Greek and Latin languages. She studied Hebrew with her daughter, in which they both made such wonderful progress as to be able to speak and write it with facility. Similarly Blæsilla, after she had renounced all the vanities of the age, following the example of her mother and sister, conceived the same desire of learning a foreign language. Though this was one peculiarly difficult for a Roman, still she realised that it was the key to a more intimate knowledge of the Old Testament. Her progress in Hebrew was no less rapid than that of her relatives. Henceforth she also became enamoured of the study of the Scriptures. We read that during a long illness, which ended in her death, she had a volume either of the Gospels or the prophetic writers continually in her hands.

The noble lady, Fabiola, was another student whose interest in Holy Scripture aroused the

enthusiastic admiration of Saint Jerome. Writing to Furia, who was a relative of Eustochium, he declared that if she could see her cousin Fabiola, not only would she be charmed with her beautiful soul, but that she would also hear from her eloquent lips all the wisdom contained in the Old and New Testaments. This was no exaggeration. The various difficulties regarding Biblical questions which this girl proposed to her master were such that he was often unable to answer at once, and was obliged to ask for time to consider them. We have here sufficient proof of the serious nature of his pupil's studies. But amongst all these noble Roman ladies, Paula and Marcella stand forth pre-eminent. With regard to the former we know from Saint Jerome her extraordinary attraction for the spiritual sense of Holy Writ, while, as for the latter, the same Saint's letter to Principia, written after Marcella's death, shows in what esteem he held her. Moreover, in various parts of his works he speaks of her with a respect and admiration which makes it clear that his farewell tribute was no idle compliment. This illustrious woman, so superior to the rest of her sex, united to her ardent faith and her indifference to all earthly things a learning which was far beyond the common. So intimate was her knowledge of Scripture, and so great the clearness of her intellect, that Saint Jerome looked up to her as to a superior, and



treated her as a competent critic of his own doctrine.

The notable increase at this epoch of Christian faith, and the more ardent practice of sublime virtue, must undoubtedly be attributed, in large measure, to that Roman school in which women of the highest social rank played so conspicuous a part. The study of the Sacred Scriptures raised men's minds to the consideration of the supernatural. It introduced them to another kind of wisdom, and taught them to despise the things of the world and to love those which are of Heaven. But this same group of illustrious Roman ladies also rendered to the Church another substantial service. It is to them we are indebted for the veritable library of precious treatises and for the numerous commentaries so invaluable for Biblical exegesis which Saint Jerome has left behind him for the instruction of posterity. It was, indeed, the searching questions daily propounded by these noble ladies which elicited the greater number of the holy Doctor's answers, many of them little treatises on the particular points at issue. It was their persistent importunities which drew from the solitary of Bethlehem, whom the censures of rivals and the malevolence of adversaries had discouraged, the greater part of his commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, the revised versions of the text, and the translations from Greek into Latin

of Origen's Homilies on the Gospels. Precious documents these last, now that the originals themselves have been altogether lost to us.

In conclusion, it must not be forgotten that all these various causes, which exercised such powerful influence upon the social reformation of Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries, amidst its deplorable moral degradation, were means ordained throughout and controlled by the action of Divine Providence. It was God's goodness which willed that the evils existing in nations should yield to remedies, and which appointed to these nations the laws under which they must advance. On the one hand, we find the mistress of the world dragged to destruction, and her gates opened to the barbarians by that ambition, pride, and pomp which, together with an ever-increasing thirst for pleasure and its concomitant boundless cupidity, were the results of an enervating naturalism such as brutalises man and destroys the most vital and ennobling principles of social life ; and, on the other hand, we see Christianity with its Divine Gospel, the eternal and unchanging rule of every moral resurrection and all real progress, inevitably provoking a reaction against the raging torrent of vice, and, at the same time, laying the foundation of a new civilisation which postulates, as its basis, an ascendancy of the mind over matter, of the soul over the body, of reason over the passions, of law

over a perverted moral sense, and, consequently, incorruptible justice, rightful liberty, and true fraternity.

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## Melania the Patrician Heiress.

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A.D. 383—403.

A KNOWLEDGE of the State of Roman Society helps us to understand the life of Saint Melania.—The most fortunate woman in the world from a worldly point of view.—Divine Providence appoints to her a different destiny.—Her exalted descent and birth on the paternal side.—Her descent on the maternal side.—Her father, Valerius Publicola.—She is brought up in great luxury.—Her great culture.—Her sufferings in her father's house because of her desire for a life of virginity.—She is forced to lead a worldly life and to enter into marriage.—Her father uses violence to compel her to marry her relative, Valerius Pinianus.—Excellent qualities of Pinianus.—Melania adheres to all her resolutions which she had made known to her husband.—Fresh sufferings.—Her spirit of penance in the midst of luxury.—Vain resistance to the designs of Providence.—Melania gives birth to two sons, who are quickly snatched from her by death.—The great love of Pinianus for Melania.—She makes a vow of chastity to obtain her husband's cure.—Death of Publicola, who asks pardon of his daughter and leaves her full liberty to dispose of her property as she wishes.—Melania leaves Rome and retires to the suburbs, where she lays aside her splendid robes, and wears the coarsest garments.—Family life.—Her generous hospitality to pilgrims, widows, and priests.—The Emperor Honorius comes to Rome to inaugurate his VI. Consulate.—Serena desires to see Melania.—Melania's resolution to dispose of her wealth for the benefit of the poor is opposed by her relatives.—She visits Serena to implore the protection of the Empress.—Fresh plots devised by Pompeianus, prefect of Rome, who is killed by the people.—Melania's enormous wealth.—Her boundless charity and unequalled generosity.—Her apostolate of charity is no obstacle to her recollection of mind and the elevation of her soul to God.

WE have sketched, in the preceding pages, a picture of Rome at the decline of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries, with its vices and its virtues, its good and its evil tendencies. We have described, more especially, the conditions prevailing in patrician houses at the time that Melania was born, and amidst which she lived for twenty-five years. Unless we keep these matters before our minds, we shall not understand her life. The unwholesome atmosphere which surrounded her from infancy, the distaste with which it must have filled her sensitive spirit, the contrast presented, on the one hand, by the torrent of evil which swept everywhere, engulfing all in its muddy waters, and, on the other, by the steady and vivifying light of Christianity, a light which irresistibly attracted noble hearts, comforting them and filling them with hope : all these things undoubtedly contributed to shape her heroic resolve and led to the wonderful mode of life which she voluntarily embraced. Let us also remember that if among her numerous relatives there were some who were stumbling-blocks to her by their sensual indulgence, there were also not a few who were the mirrors of every virtue. The example of these latter must have been a strong and continuous stimulus urging her to follow in their footsteps. Amongst those allied to her by the ties of kindred were the elder Melania, Marcella,

Asella, Avita, Laeta, Pammachius, Paulinus, Aproninus. These were the ornaments of the Christian aristocracy, the most beautiful flowers in the glorious garland which adorned the Roman Church in those far-off days.

Viewing things from the standpoint of the world, we must admit that Melania could not have come into the world under happier auspices. Happiness smiled upon her in her golden cradle. She was the idol of many, the envied of all. What more could the heart of maiden desire? Descended of an ancient lineage which was the pride even of Rome, she could claim in the near past, as well as in ages more remote, kindred with the wealthiest and most powerful houses. Her paternal and maternal relatives, during the whole of that century, had held with great distinction the highest offices in the State. Melania could even boast of imperial blood. An only child, she was the sole heiress of her father and paternal grandfather, and, at their deaths, enormous estates passed into her possession. No other patrician family could compete with hers in wealth. Her palace, royal in its splendour and magnificence, contained such riches that we are told she could not find a purchaser for it, because, in all Rome, there was no one wealthy enough to pay the price demanded.

Nature had endowed Melania with the fairest gifts of mind and body. In addition to rare

beauty, she was possessed of a sweet, generous disposition, ever inclined to good. Her intellectual gifts were cultivated to the highest degree, and she profited to the utmost by all the educational advantages which were open to her. Beautiful, rich, and cultured, this most favoured child seemed born for earthly happiness. But Providence had designed for her a far different destiny. Instead of falling a victim to the corrupt tendencies of Roman society, she was to offer herself as a voluntary sacrifice of expiation for the decadent race which unchecked vice was fast hurrying to its doom. The priests, indeed, from the pulpits of Christian temples thundered in vain against the spread of evil, and even pagan writers used their pens against the all-pervading depravity. But the rôle assumed by Melania was the most efficacious protest that could be offered against the corruption of the ancient city : a protest not indeed made in words, but rather with the eloquence of deeds. The whole course of her life tended to the purest and most perfect fulfilment of the Gospel precepts. She was a living reproach to the prevailing errors and the mad excesses of the Roman patricians. If the extraordinary life of Saint Melania should seem to some to present a difficulty, it is in this fact that we find the solution of the problem.

Melania was born at Rome in the year 383. Her father, the senator Publicola, was of the illus-

trious house of the Valerii, whilst her mother was of the equally noble Ceionian *gens*, which, at the beginning of the fourth century, became merged in the families of the Rufii and Cecina. Her paternal grandparents were Valerius Maximus, who was very probably the same who filled the office of prefect in the year 362, and the elder Melania, of the Antonia family, a lady illustrious not only by birth, but also by her sanctity. She was left a widow at twenty-two years of age, with only one child, a son, Publicola, the rest having been taken from her by death. She renounced the world, and retired to Jerusalem, where she devoted herself to a life of prayer and solitude.

Melania's grandfather on the maternal side was the pagan pontifex Albinus, who, although an idolator, was a distinguished and very learned man. Her grandmother, on the other hand, was a fervent Christian, whose salutary influence had done much to sanctify that pagan household. In point of fact, Melania's mother, Albina, like her sister Laeta, was brought up in the faith of Christ, and it may well be that Melania, like Laeta's little daughter, Paula, in her early childhood lisped her prayers to the true God at the old priest's knee.

Publicola, whom his pious mother had offered to God in infancy, received a Christian education. He was a man of tender conscience, as we gather from his letters to Saint Augustine. He was also



of gentle disposition and extremely charitable, but, like all mankind, he had his faults. A young patrician, enormously wealthy, descended from a family who had a glorious history in the annals of Rome, proud of the name which he bore—the name of his great ancestor, P. Valerius Publicola, first of the Roman Consuls—he was not by any means proof against the spirit of worldliness. There was nothing which he had more at heart than to outshine all his colleagues in the senate in pomp and luxury. Then, the fact of his being the one representative of the principal branch of the *gens* Valeria, and having no male issue to succeed him, caused him to place all his hopes for the future in his only child, Melania, who was his idol. He was, therefore, careful to give her such an education as would correspond with his cherished ideal. He had no other thought but to form her to be the first and most admired matron in Rome.

Thus it was that from infancy Melania was surrounded by her parents with every refinement of luxury. Nothing could exceed the rich elegance of her attire. At the same time, her mind and understanding were trained in all that culture which, in senatorial families, was the highest mark of distinction. We know for a certainty that she spoke Greek with as much fluency as if it were her native tongue, and she wrote with ease and elegance. She possessed a

beautiful voice, and there is some reason to suppose that she was a trained musician.

The care with which this young girl was educated cannot be better described than in the words of her uncle, her mother's brother, Volusianus. He was several times prefect of Rome, and was sent by Honorius III. as envoy to the court of Theodosius II. When he met his beloved niece once more in Constantinople, after twenty years of separation, he could not restrain his tears at seeing her so utterly changed. Turning to his companion, he exclaimed, "Oh! if you could only know with what care beyond all others of our house she was brought up, and how she was precious as the apple of her father's eye. I can compare her to nothing but a rosebud or a lily about to blossom, gradually unfolding its petals, and growing each day more beautiful."

But this great solicitude of her parents, which, however affectionate it may have been, was yet purely human, was the cause of great torture to the innocent girl. Melania was not, like so many noble Roman ladies of the time, a convert to Christianity. She had never tasted the bitter fruit of Roman corruption. She came into the world with an instinctive hatred of those infamous customs which were the canker then eating out the heart of primitive Roman society. Her pure angelic soul revolted from the licentious manners

which held sway around her. From her earliest years, the love of God completely filled her heart. She herself on her death-bed declared that in early childhood she had consecrated herself wholly to Christ. Providence, which had implanted these desires in the girl's heart, did not permit them to remain barren. She had, in the example of many of her relatives, a powerful incentive to urge her to a life of chastity and self-renunciation. We are not alluding to her grandmother, the elder Melania. She did not meet her grand-daughter until after the latter had become a mother, nor is it to be supposed that she could influence the child by means of letters unknown to her parents, who had destined her for life in the world. The strongest power for good was probably Marcella, who was truly a guardian angel to many other Christian families of Rome. Seeing that Marcella manifested such an earnest desire that Paula, the daughter of her niece Laeta, should be trained to a life of virginity, we can hardly doubt that she must have shown the same loving anxiety with regard to Melania, who was bound to her by the same tie of kindred. Nor can we doubt that the latter found in her illustrious aunt a powerful protector and consoler. What a daily martyrdom it must have been for this saintly girl to be obliged to lead the life of indulgence and luxurious ease of her father's house, with all its attendant pomp and splendour. But a

worse martyrdom was to come. She had scarcely emerged from childhood when her parents began to discuss the question of her marriage, and to acquaint her with their wishes on that point. The reverence and respect which she felt for her parents precluded any overt resistance, and they, availing themselves of the unbounded authority which custom and the Roman law accorded to parents, did not hesitate to impose their will upon her. The discovery that their daughter's inclinations were opposed to their designs only caused them to assert their authority with more unbending firmness.

This important question of marriage must have caused much and serious thought to both parents and child. How Melania must have devoted all the energy of her mind to the devising of some method of escape, whilst her parents were studying how they could best secure the continuance of their ancient line. We learn from her biographer that her marriage was carefully planned in family council, in order that the name of the Valerii might go down to posterity and that their enormous possessions might not help to increase the power and splendour of another house. In the brief notice of Melania which we find in the Menology of the Emperor Basil Porphyrogenitus, it is mentioned that, on account of her rare beauty and enormous wealth, she was much sought for in

marriage, but that Publicola, desiring to have a relative for his son-in-law, chose one of the sons of his cousin, Valerius Severus, who was prefect of Rome in 382. Valerius Pinianus was the chosen bridegroom, a youth of most attractive qualities, who probably was especially acceptable to his future father-in-law because he dressed well, made a good appearance, and loved the easy life of a Roman patrician. He had also the advantage of being a Christian.

We cannot doubt that Melania, on hearing that her marriage had been arranged, overcame her natural timidity, and, following the example of her friend, Cecilia, plainly told her parents of her wish to consecrate herself to God. But her pious aspirations found no favour with those whose thoughts and interests were entirely worldly. We have no record of the tears and anguish which the shadow of that impending wedding must have cost the saintly child. We know not if anyone interceded on her behalf, nor what steps she took to gain her cause, nor with what earnest pleading she besought her parents to allow her to follow her inclinations. But the resistance of a girl of thirteen could not avail much against the strong will of a father who had determined that through his daughter the family name should be perpetuated. All that the history of her life tells us is that pressure was used

to force Melania into a union with Pinianus, and that the marriage was really carried out against her will.\*

By the merciful arrangement of God, who ordained that all these events should have a very different result from that planned by human foresight, Melania found in Pinianus a husband worthy of herself. The marriage was celebrated in 397, when the bride was not yet fourteen, while the bridegroom had just attained his seventeenth year. He was an excellent young fellow, good hearted, and of irreproachable morals. It says much for him that the saintly Bishop of Nola, Paulinus, loved him as a son. He would have been a perfect Christian but for his excessive desire of outstripping all his compeers in elegance and lavish expenditure. This fault must be attributed to the tendency of the age and to his early training in his parents' house. He held his wife in the highest esteem, not because of her enormous wealth, but on account of her rare gifts of mind and body, which gained for her a complete ascendancy over him. He recognised in her an angelic soul, and his love for her was so great that he yielded to her wishes in everything rather than cause her the slightest displeasure.

From the first day of her married life, Melania entered upon a new phase of existence—one

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\* See Palladius *Historia Lausiaca*, p. 87.

filled with moral torture, with struggles, and with triumphs. Throughout it all we find her ever manifesting such sweetness of disposition, such modesty, and such respect for her husband as excites our highest admiration. At the same time, the constancy and fixity of purpose she displayed could only come from strength supernaturally bestowed. The Gospel of Christ, which she had meditated upon from childhood, had taken so firm a hold of her understanding and will that all else was as nought to her. She found in the Evangelical precepts and counsels her rule of life clearly marked, and nothing could ever induce her to deviate from it. So earnest was she in her love of higher things that she offered to place her enormous fortune at the disposal of her husband, to do as he liked with it, if he would only consent to let her serve our Lord in a life of virginal chastity. Pinianus demurred, but he gave a sort of promise that some time in the future he might accede to her request, and with this she had, perforce, to be content.

It had been settled that the young couple, scarcely more than children, should reside with Publicola in his palace on the Coelian Hill. This was the cause of much suffering to Melania. Her fervour daily increased, and with it her horror of a life of luxury and sensual ease. Living constantly under her father's watchful eye, she was obliged to

comply with his wishes, and to sustain the honour of the family by conforming to all the usages of Roman society. She had to dress with all the splendour befitting a matron of exalted rank, and to make her appearance in public surrounded with much state. All this was so repugnant to the young wife that it caused her real torture. She sought by the most ingenious devices to find an outlet for her spirit of penance and expiation. A curious and characteristic incident may serve to illustrate this. "When this most blessed lady," we are told, "was sent to the bath by her parents, she went indeed as she was bidden, but unwillingly and under compulsion. So when she entered the heated chamber, she only washed her face and wiped it just for appearance sake ; then calling to her all her hand-maidens, she gave them money and besought them not to betray her and disclose to her parents the fact that she had not bathed. And thus returning from the bath she made pretence as if she had been bathing. So deeply the longing for God had sunk into her soul."

Again, she spent whole nights kneeling in prayer in her private oratory, and wore rough hair-cloth beneath her jewelled robes. Being detected in these penitential exercises, she was sternly forbidden them, and was subjected to redoubled surveillance, a crowd of eunuchs and handmaidens being appointed to attend upon her



continually. The system of espionage was carried so far that even the privacy of her own apartments was no longer respected. She was forbidden to hold any intercourse with notably pious people, lest they might encourage her in her dislike for the life which she was obliged to lead.

But of what avail are man's short-sighted plans against the eternal designs of God? All that human wisdom and foresight could do had been done to ensure that the greatest of Rome's patrician houses should retain its proud pre-eminence and its reputation for lavish display. But it had been decreed in the Eternal Counsels that from this proud house should shine forth a glorious Christian example to serve as a protest against the increasing corruption of the world. At all costs an heir must be assured for the richest patrimony in the capital of the empire. But again Eternal Wisdom had decreed that, notwithstanding all precautions, an heir should be wanting, and that this colossal patrimony should be devoted to feeding the poor and to the assuaging of human misery. Every means was adopted to prevent a young girl from following the vocation to which God had called her. Nevertheless we shall see this girl guided in every step by Divine Providence until she is enabled at last, all human opposition notwithstanding, to carry out that vocation in full accord with her desires.

Melania's first child proved to be a girl, whom the young mother consecrated to God from her birth. Now that she had given the longed-for heir to her father's name, Melania fondly hoped that she would be allowed to follow her inclinations. But the moment had not yet come. The advent of the girl-baby was indeed welcomed, but husband and parents hoped that time would yet give them the male heir which they coveted.

Their joy may be imagined when, on the Feast of St. Laurence, Melania gave birth to a son. The happiness of the house of the Valerii seemed indeed to have reached its climax. Alas ! it proved but short-lived. All the proud, sweet hopes which blossomed around the infant's cradle perished as they bloomed, and sorrow took up its abode in the splendid halls of the palace on the Cœlian Hill. The day after his birth, while the baptismal waters yet glistened upon his brow, the heir to so much earthly greatness closed his innocent eyes upon it all for ever. But the biographer's account of this incident, as it may be read in the Latin version of his story, deserves to be reproduced in full. The passage will give an idea of the many curious illustrations which St. Melania's life affords regarding the religious practices of Christian Rome at the end of the fourth century :

“Now it happened that the day was at hand

for the festival and solemn commemoration of the martyr St. Laurence. [This must have been August 10th of the year 399.] In her great ardour of spirit the most blessed damsel was eager to go and keep the whole night with watchings in the basilica of the holy martyr. But this her parents would not permit because she was too weakly and delicate of body to support this labour of watchings. So she fearing her parents, yet desiring to find favour with God, remained there watching in the oratory of her own house, continuing upon her bended knees until morning and beseeching God with many tears that He would grant the desire of her heart. When the day dawned her father sent eunuchs to see how his daughter, their mistress, had rested in her chamber. They, coming, found her still upon her knees in converse with God, praying earnestly unto the Lord. Just then she rose to depart, and as she looked round she saw them standing there; whereupon, in great distress and terror, she began to coax them and to promise them money if only they would not inform her father of what they had seen, but would tell him instead that they had found her sleeping in her room.\* It was often she spent the night like this, and she always tried to conceal it. On this occasion she rose at an

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\* It is noteworthy that this incident is omitted in the Greek Life. It is hard to say which more nearly represents the original.

early hour, and along with her holy mother went to the martyr-church of Blessed Laurence, and there, with many tears, prayed to the Lord that there might be given to her a stout heart in the service of God ; for she greatly longed for a life of solitude in the Lord. On her return from the martyr-church she was seized with the throes of child-birth, and amid agonies of pain she was brought even to the point of death. A boy was born prematurely, who was baptized that same day. The next day his soul passed to God."

Melania meanwhile lay at the point of death, and as the climax of grief and disappointment came the death of her little daughter.

In this moment of supreme trial, Pinianus gave convincing proof of his intense love for his bride. On learning that grave fears were entertained for her life, he ran, half frantic with grief, to the tomb of Saint Laurence, and there, with torrents of tears, implored the intercession of the illustrious martyr who is so dear to the Romans, offering the sacrifice of his own life provided that his beloved wife might recover. Melania, hearing of this vow as she lay upon what seemed her death-bed, sent Pinianus word that his prayer would only be granted if he gave his consent to her consecrating the remainder of her life to God. Her husband at once formally and unconditionally gave his promise that in future Melania should be free to

serve God according to the dictates of her heart. Henceforth he would be to her only a brother. Melania was overwhelmed with joy ; and yet she rejoiced not so much at her speedy and entire restoration to health, and her deliverance from the bondage which was so hateful to her, as at the thought that she had won her husband's heart to God. The parents, however, embittered as they were by the overthrow of all their earthly hopes, in no wise changed their attitude towards their daughter. They exacted from her the same entire compliance with all the habits and customs of fashionable Roman life. They forbade as sternly as ever the carrying out of her religious intentions. To all her tears and prayers, they answered that they could not bear the storm of abuse and censure which would burst over their heads if they yielded to her wishes.

At last, after seven years of married life, Melania's constancy was rewarded, and the sufferings inflicted on her by her parents came to an end. Her father was stricken with mortal illness, and knowing that he was about to depart from this life, he implored his daughter's forgiveness for his hardness. He withdrew all opposition to her holy desires, and, moreover, left her full and uncontrolled possession of all his wealth. But the biographer's own brief account of these last days is worth quoting :—"And as the young husband

and wife," he says, "experienced great pain, seeing that, by their parents' violence, they could not freely take up the yoke of Christ, they began to meditate withdrawing into solitude, abandoning the city altogether. But whilst they cherished these thoughts in their hearts, as the blessed one related to myself, behold there came to them in their desolation a sudden odour of Paradise, they knew not how, and the darkness of their melancholy was changed into ineffable joy. And returning thanks to God, they took confidence again to meet the assaults of the enemy.

"Afterwards, with the advance of years, her father was seized with his last illness, and being a very good Christian, he sent for the blessed ones, and said: 'Children, forgive me, that through extreme foolishness I have fallen into great sin, because, fearing the ridicule of evil tongues, I have grieved you by putting obstacles in the way of your heavenly vocation; but, behold, I am now going to the Lord, and you, for the future, having power over yourselves, gratify your desire according to the Will of God, provided you have stability. Only may the Lord God of all things grant me His mercy.' These words they heard with great gladness. Then, when he had fallen asleep in the Lord, taking confidence, they at once went forth from the great city of Rome, and in its suburbs, free from solicitude they trained themselves in every

virtue, knowing well that it would be impossible for them to render pure worship to God unless they kept themselves aloof from all intermeddling with the things of this world, according to what is written : Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear : and forget thy people and thy father's house " (Ps. xliv., 11).

Melania was now, at last, free to follow the call of God. After so many years of suffering and hard struggle, she had conquered. Nor was this all. Her mother and her husband, finding it impossible to shake her resolution, resolved to join her in her mode of life. Following in her footsteps, they trod the rugged path of perfection, and, like her, became the models of every virtue. What marvellous power of attraction must this young girl, barely twenty years of age, have possessed to exercise such fascination.

Melania's first step after the death of Publicola was, as we have just heard, to leave Rome. Social depravity had rendered the atmosphere of the city stifling and unbearable to her. Hence she quitted her splendid palace, and took up her abode in one of her villas in the neighbourhood. She thus marked her reprobation of the sensual life which degenerate Romans were leading within the walls of the city, drawing down upon themselves the Divine vengeance of which the sword of Alaric the Goth and the burning brands of his barbarian

hordes were five years afterwards to be the instruments.

Melania's removal from Rome took place in the spring of the year 404. Her dislike to rich apparel, which had caused her so much suffering during her father's life, now led her to put away her silken robes, her gold ornaments, and everything that was rich and costly in her attire. She wore a garment of coarse wool of the cheapest kind, and fashioned rather to hide and disfigure her beautiful form. Pinianus could not at first be induced to adopt such a mode of dress, and he clung to rich clothes of Cilician cloth. Melania, however, very soon won him sweetly and lovingly to accept rough woollen garments like her own, and afterwards she herself made his clothes with her own hands, fashioning them rudely from undyed wool. From henceforth the proud Roman nature was conquered.

Now if we consider ever so little the manner in which this young girl spent the first months in her country house, we shall easily perceive what a tremendous change had occurred in the lives of that patrician family. How delightful to Melania must have been those enchanting days of the lovely Roman springtime. She was surrounded by all the beauty of awakening Nature. Each day she saw develop before her a rich growth of leaf and flower. There, in the tranquil silence, broken only by the



silver rippling of the fountains, the murmur of the soft zephyr sighing among the leaves, or by the matutinal warblings of the birds, her pure soul must have held unceasing communings with God. In that quiet retreat she led a life of Christian modesty and simplicity which aimed strictly at the perfection of the Gospel.

This home of Christian virtue could not strictly be called a monastery. There was nothing about it to justify the name. It was simply the abode of a large family, all the members of which were actuated with the one desire to live recollected in God, and to attain Christian perfection. We might in truth say that they were as angels who had come on earth to rebuke, by their spotless lives, the wickedness of the neighbouring Babylon. They formed such a family as could be found only within the Christian fold—a family every member of which offered perpetual worship with heart and tongue to the Creator of the universe, to the Redeemer of the human race ; a family who, by their humble, penitential lives, made reparation to Divine Justice for the pride and sensuality of their countrymen, and who, by the shining example of holiness, preached continually to those around them with an eloquence which does not belong to words.

Although Melania had left her native city, she could not find it in her heart to forsake that crowd

of dependents who, like a flock of sheep, were always attached to the great houses in Rome, and were ever ready to do their patrons' behests. She had studied in the Gospel the sublime doctrine of universal brotherhood, and in all these dependents she recognised the same image of the Creator as was impressed upon herself. Hence it was that she took with her to her villa a great number of poor families and of slaves, whom she henceforth treated as brothers and sisters. There, the cruel lash never left its livid mark upon those unhappy beings or caused their blood to flow when, by mischance, they had forgotten to bring hot water to their mistress at the appointed time. There, the charity of Christ held supreme sway, and Melania lived with her slaves in community of thought and feeling, practising with them every Christian virtue, instructing them with tenderness, labouring for their moral improvement, and sitting beside them at the same table.

She went still further. Forgetting the great lady, she, the first amongst Roman matrons, shared with her slaves the daily round of domestic duties. What horror, what scandal must such behaviour have caused those haughty Roman dames of the Capital who were accustomed to regard those who waited on them as beings of a lower nature. Here undoubtedly we have one of the most precious results of Christianity. If it had been possible,

the Christian religion would have abolished slavery as an institution at one stroke, but this could not have been done without shaking society to its foundations. But to Christianity is due the indisputable merit of having abolished slavery in practice.

Although prayer and the chanting of the Psalms formed the principal occupations of each day, still the works of active charity were by no means neglected. The villa of the Valerii must have been of enormous size, for it was large enough to lodge the immense number of people whom Melania took with her from Rome, consisting, as we gather from Palladius, of fifteen eunuchs, fifty young girls who were vowed to virginity, with other free-born women, slaves, and more than thirty families who had followed Pinianus in his new mode of life. But in addition to these regular inmates, Melania's country house afforded hospitality to the pilgrims who repaired to the Eternal City. Foremost amongst these, bishops and priests were received with every mark of honour and respect. History has chronicled the hospitality accorded in this villa to the numerous deputations of bishops, priests, and monks who came to Rome, in the latter end of 404 and the beginning of 405, to plead the cause of Saint Chrysostom with the Holy Father, Innocent I. Amongst these were Palladius, the author of the

Lausiac History, and Cassian, the Deacon of the Church in Constantinople, who is well known for his famous Collations. Palladius speaks with lively expressions of gratitude of the respectful welcome and the generous hospitality with which he was entertained during his sojourn, and of the large sum of money presented to him on his departure in February, 406.

Whilst dispensing such lavish hospitality, and sparing no expense in the entertainment of her guests, Melania practised the most rigid mortification in her own daily life. When she first left Rome, her glowing fervour and love of penance urged her to such severe fasts and other penitential exercises that her delicate frame, fresh from the comparative luxury of her father's house, was as yet unable to support the strain, and she was obliged to moderate her ardour. Still, she soon made so much progress in her endurance of austerities of this kind, that it seemed incredible in one so delicately nurtured. But Melania's most striking characteristic was her love for the poor. They were ever foremost in her thoughts, and the chief objects of her care and solicitude. Thus it was that in order to be able to afford them greater assistance in their misery, she determined to dispose of her vast estates. This determination, as we shall see, was the cause of much suffering and trial.

The unexpected withdrawal from Rome of one

of the greatest families of fabulous wealth to lead a life of mortification in the seclusion of the country was no doubt a great encouragement to the Church and all pious Christians, who rejoiced at this fresh triumph of virtue. Still, amongst the Roman aristocracy, steeped in sensuality, it awakened surprise and contempt. For the present, however, Melania's name, coupled with the fame of her heroic action, had spread far and wide, and she was everywhere regarded as a woman worthy of the greatest admiration. It was at this time, that is, towards the end of December, 403, the imperial Court came from Ravenna to Rome, to be present when Honorius, on the first of January, entered upon his seventh consulate. The emperor, we learn, was lodged at the palace of the Cæsars, and Claudianus has painted in glowing colours the festivities with which his presence in Rome was celebrated. All the great houses played a conspicuous and imposing part in these splendid demonstrations. Had Publicola been still alive, Melania would have held the first rank amongst the proud Roman dames at all the entertainments. However, there were not wanting those who remembered the state and magnificence which surrounded the beautiful girl but a few short months before, and now, recalling the wondrous change in her life, they told the story in the imperial palace. As a result the Princess Serena, the adopted sister

and also the mother-in-law of the Emperor, was much impressed, and in fine she expressed a great desire to meet a lady of such admirable virtue.

Serena was, at that time, all-powerful at Court, and after the death of her daughter, the Empress Maria, she became "Queen" (Regina) both in name and in fact. She was a woman of the strongest religious feeling. Being brought into continual touch with all the bishops who came to Rome, since they naturally went to the palace to pay their respects to the Emperor, Serena availed herself of this intercourse to request such of the bishops as were Melania's guests to induce their hostess to pay her a visit. She also asked the same favour of several of the Roman ladies who were either friends or relatives of the saintly girl. But Melania, in her great humility, feared that a visit to the palace would result in her being obliged to listen to praises of herself, hence several times over, with suitable excuses, she gracefully declined the invitation. Circumstances, however, at last obliged her to seek an audience with the princess of her own accord.

Pinianus had given full consent to Melania's project of selling her property for the benefit of the poor, and thus fulfilling in its entirety the Evangelical counsel. But no sooner was her resolution made known than the cupidity of many of the senators, and particularly of her relatives, was

aroused. They considered that they had now a favourable opportunity to enrich themselves beyond all expectation by taking advantage of the simplicity and inexperience of these young people, whom they frankly regarded as lunatics. Amongst these, Valerius Severus, the brother of Pinianus, distinguished himself for his unprincipled knavery. Whilst he craftily disputed with his brother and sister-in-law their right to dispose of the family estates, he, at the same time, secretly suborned their dependents, who were engaged on the farms in the neighbourhood of Rome. Encouraging them to mutiny by handsome bribes, he urged them to insist that, in the event of the estates being sold, they would accept no one as master but himself. This unexpected opposition caused the young couple great consternation. They feared much that the rebellion of the slaves on their Roman property might extend to the vast estates which they possessed in the various provinces. After long and anxious consideration, they came to the conclusion that they had no resource but to appeal directly to Honorius, meanwhile imploring the good offices of the princess on their behalf.

One of the most attractive episodes in Melania's life is her visit to the palace of the Cæsars in 404, which was the result of this determination. The young wife, with her husband, appeared before Serena, not indeed in the gorgeous robes and

dazzling jewels in which Court etiquette required that a patrician matron should be attired, but in the coarsest of woollen garments, and modestly veiled. But it will be interesting to reproduce the record of this interview as it is set down in the pages of Melania's biographer.

"By reason," says this faithful chronicler, "of their dispute with Severus, Melania and her husband sought to procure an interview with the most pious queen, which duly came to pass, the holy bishops interceding in their behalf. And as we imagine that it would be of great profit to narrate a few things of their meeting, which she often recounted to our edification, I shall set them down in all truth for the benefit of those who may by chance come across this my writing. Now it happened that there were many who thought that, according to the custom of the Roman senators' wives, the Blessed Melania would have to uncover her head at the interview, but she declared her firm resolution not to make any change in her garments, remembering the text, 'I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on?' (Cant. v. 3). Neither would she remove the veil from her head, out of regard to the Apostle's warning that it is unseemly for a woman to pray with her head uncovered. 'No,' she said; 'not even if it were to cause the loss of everything I have will I change my resolution, for it is better



that I should not transgress a single iota of the Scriptures and so act against my conscience in the sight of God, not even were I thereby to gain the whole world.' For in truth her ordinary garments were to her the robe of salvation, and she considered all her life as one continuous act of prayer. For which reason she would not take off her veil, even for a short time, lest she should grieve the Angels, her companions. Having taken with her precious ornaments of no little value and crystal vases as presents to the pious Queen, with other rich trinkets also in the form of rings and silver and silken robes as presents for the faithful eunuchs and majordomos, she arrived at the Palace, and, being announced, they were permitted to enter.

"The pious Queen with great gladness immediately went to meet them at the entrance of the colonnade, and, seeing the blessed one in those poor garments, she was greatly moved, and welcoming her, she made her sit down upon her own throne of gold. Then she called all her attendants of the palace round her, and thus began to speak to them : 'Come and behold her whom we saw four years ago at the height of worldly grandeur, and whom we now perceive grown old in celestial wisdom. Let us learn from her how reason, guided by the fear of the Lord, is superior to all earthly delights. Behold,

one who has trampled under foot her delicate up-bringing, her abounding wealth, the state of her high position, and absolutely everything that is pleasant in this world, fearing neither the frailty of the flesh nor voluntary poverty, nor any other of those things which we hold in horror. She has resolutely curbed human nature itself, and given herself up to daily death, affording proof to all by these works how woman, in the practice of virtue, when resolution is strong, will not allow herself to be surpassed by man in anything.'

"And the servant of God, listening to these things, was not puffed up by the praise, but the more the Queen exalted her, the more she humbled herself, fulfilling the word of the prophet: All the glory of man is as the grass of the field. And the Queen embraced her and kissed her brow as she related to those present how much the two had suffered in their renunciation of the world, and how they had been grieved by the father's persecution, and how they were prevented from holding any converse whatever with holy persons, and from hearing the words of salvation regarding the way of God. For the devil drove the aforesaid father to such length that, although an excellent man, he committed great sin under pretext of good. Indeed, it was suspected that he wished to take away their

property and give it to other descendants, by these means trying to prevent their heavenly purpose. Then once more the Queen, treating them both as Saints, spoke of the machinations of Severus, the brother of the lord Pinianus, who plotted to get all their wealth, which consisted of great and vast possessions, safely into his own keeping : and how each of their relatives in the senate was scheming to lay hands on their property, wishing to enrich themselves. And she said to them : ‘ If it please you, I will indeed make Severus smart for this, so that having acquired wisdom, he shall learn not to defraud those who have consecrated their souls to the Lord.’

“ But the saints gave this answer to the Queen : ‘ Christ commanded us to suffer injuries without bearing malice ; to allow ourselves to be struck on the right cheek and to turn the other, and if any man would force us one mile, to go with him two ; and to him who takes away our coat, to let go also our cloak. Wherefore it is not seemly for us to render evil for evil, the more so that those who try to injure us are our relatives. We have confidence in Christ our Lord that by means of His divine assistance, and under favour of your Majesty’s good will, our modest substance will be well expended.’

“ When the Queen heard these words, being most favourably impressed by them, she at once

signified to her truly pious and Christian brother, the most blessed Emperor Honorius, that he should send orders to every province to the effect that their possessions should be sold at the responsibility of the governors and public administrators, and that likewise they should be responsible for the remittance of the price to the Blessed Melania and her husband. And the Christian Emperor carried this into effect so readily and so promptly that, whilst they were still closeted with the Queen, the commands were given and the executors appointed. The holy pair were filled with wonder at the benignity of these most pious princes, and magnifying God the Saviour for all, they both drew the precious ornaments from the crystal vases and offered them to their Majesties with the words, 'Take from us these trifles as blessings, in the same way as Christ took the two farthings from the widow.' And she (the Queen), at these words, with a sweet smile, thus answered them: 'The Lord knows your charity and compassion. Wherefore, I regard him who takes any of your goods, saving only religious and the poor, as one who steals from the altar, and heaps everlasting fire upon his own head, because he takes the things which are consecrated to God.' Wherefore the Queen ordered the Master of the Palace and two other illustrious eunuchs to conduct them back to their house, with

every respect, swearing by the salvation of her most pious brother that neither they nor anyone else belonging to the palace should be permitted to take from them even so much as a single coin. And this escort, who, as it chanced, were good Christian servants of their good Christian Highnesses, executed with all gladness and alacrity the orders which they had received."

But even the Emperor's intervention did not remove all difficulties from their path. The young couple had still much opposition and even danger to encounter. A part of their estates remained still unsold, and their avaricious opponents, taking advantage of the critical state of affairs in Rome at the latter end of 408, owing to the invasion of the Goths, contrived, with the secret co-operation of the senate that the remaining estates should be adjudged confiscate to the Treasury. They were supported in their nefarious design by the prefect, Pompeianus, a fanatical worshipper of idols. The sentence of confiscation had already been drafted, but on the very day when it was to be proclaimed by the prefect, the people, rendered frantic by scarcity of bread, rose in rebellion, seized Pompeianus in his tribunal, and dragging him through the streets, finally put him to death in the centre of the city. Thus did God make manifest His care for the patrimony of the poor. Melania and Pinianus, unconscious of the mischief

plotted against them, had quitted Rome shortly before the outbreak of this riot.

The sale of such enormous estates must inevitably have taken several years to complete. If we bear in mind that the smallest of Melania's properties yielded an income of almost fabulous amount, having regard to the value of money in those times so far removed from our own, we can properly estimate her heroism in trampling earthly goods under foot that she might live up to her supernatural ideals.

It seems certain beyond all doubt that none of the wealthiest Roman patricians enjoyed such a prodigious fortune. It is also worthy of remark that the purchasers of Melania's property, no matter how rich or powerful, were quite unable to pay the full purchase-money at once. In the majority of cases the owners were obliged to accept promissory notes. Melania's palace on the Coelian Hill, of which she was anxious from the very first to dispose, was so magnificent and contained such an accumulation of riches that it was impossible to find a purchaser for it. It remained unsold, and in 410, after it had been pillaged by Alaric's barbarian hordes and partly destroyed by fire, it was given away for nothing. The other properties were scattered everywhere. Vast estates belonging to the most illustrious house of the Valerii were to be found in Italy, Sicily,

Africa, Gaul, Spain, Britain, and even in regions still more remote. One of these, near Tagaste, was of such extent and importance as to number amongst the population workers in gold, silver, and bronze; whilst two episcopal sees were included within its circumference, one belonging to the Catholic Church, the other to the Donatists. We are not, therefore, surprised to learn from the Saint's biographer that some of the rooms in her house were filled with gold, the dazzling light of which, he tells us, resembled that of flames of fire.

The contrast of such wealth with the misery in which the greater number of her fellow-creatures were plunged, rendered its possession an intolerable burthen to Melania, whose pure heart was enamoured with evangelical poverty. No words could express the joy which she experienced in the entire renunciation of this wealth. There was no province in the East or the West which did not experience the beneficial effects of her charity. The poor, the sick, pilgrims, those imprisoned for debt, citizens carried off into captivity by pirates, rational human beings groaning under the yoke of slavery, churches, monasteries: all continually received large subsidies from this heroine of the Gospel of Christ, whose hand was never weary of bestowing charity. It was indeed a sublime spectacle to behold her continually

stretching forth that beneficent hand in aid of prisoners and penitents, seeking everywhere the sick, the hungry, and everywhere bringing relief to all. During the first two years after she left Rome she restored to freedom no less than eight thousand slaves. Her biographer tells us that to enumerate those whom she liberated in the subsequent years would be quite beyond his power. Be it noted also that this great apostolate of charity, which aimed at healing the gangrenous sores of society, was no hindrance to Melania's recollection of mind, or to the continual elevation of her soul to God. The sweet persuasiveness of her words penetrated the hearts of others and conquered all opposition. Her example was as a shining light in the murky darkness which enveloped ancient Rome—a light which revealed a mode of life hitherto wholly unknown, but not the less sublime in its aim, and worthy of all imitation.



## The Great Renunciation.

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A.D. 403—407.

ST. PAULINUS of Nola.—Melania becomes his Guest, January, 406.—Flight to Sicily.—Death of Rufinus.—The Storm off Lipari.—Africa.—St. Augustine.—Residence at Tagaste.—Sale of her property.—Monastic Apostolate.—Life of Penance and Charity.

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FOR about four years Melania continued to live with the numerous household which she had gathered round her in the constant exercise of piety. Keeping always at a distance from Rome, she sojourned for periods of various duration upon those estates still remaining unsold in the Campania and in Sicily, and those in the country surrounding Rome. It is during these years, at the beginning of 406, probably after a short sojourn in Sicily, that we find her at Nola, pursuing the same mode of life, as the guest of St. Paulinus. We will try to offer a rough sketch of the picture which is here set before us. It would, indeed, require a more gifted hand to present it in all the beauty of its conception, the harmony of its tints, and the vividness of its colouring.

The figure of Paulinus stands out in the first place mild, serene, radiating heavenly light,

breathing purity, and compelling our love. The noble senator, the consul and magistrate, whose youth had been passed amid wealth and honours, reveals himself to us humble, simple, modest as a child. He it was who had unhesitatingly trampled on the world, who had been the faithful follower of Christ in poverty, in meekness, in charity ; a man whose writings were full of unction, models of elegance, so far as was possible in that decadent age, and who was the inspired poet of a pure and holy muse. Paulinus and his beloved wife Therasia, despising the world, had distributed their wealth amongst the poor. Then, going to Barcelona, he had been ordained priest, after which he retired to a corner of sunny Campania, near the tomb of the martyr St. Felix, for whom he had ever cherished such tender devotion. His dwelling at Nola, which was about a mile from any other habitation, was a spring of living water whence flowed innumerable blessings. Numberless were the works of piety with which he surrounded the shrine of the Saint of his predilection. The martyr's tomb was enclosed by five sanctuaries, or small basilicas, like a splendid jewel in the centre of a casket ; whilst guest-houses for pilgrims, hospices for the poor, and monasteries for men and women presented from afar the appearance of a little town which derived its life from the sacred ashes which lay in the heart of it. But the great

works undertaken by Paulinus in 402-403 were the crowning glory and ornament of the renovated Nola. He restored and improved the ancient basilica erected in the martyr's honour. He also caused a new church to be built, of great size and richly decorated, which was in truth a monument of Christian art, with magnificent porticoes and fountains, for which a copious supply of water was brought from the adjacent Avella. Great crowds of pilgrims flocked thither from all parts to implore the martyr's intercession.

It was January of the year 406, and peace was once more smiling upon Italy after so much storm and calamity. The defeat of Rhadagaisus and his powerful army had scattered the storm-clouds which so long had lowered over Italy. Paulinus rejoiced exceedingly that the threatened danger had been averted, but he rejoiced still more at the circle of most dear and honoured guests which that January brought together under his roof. It was in truth a goodly company. Melania and her husband Pinianus, and her mother Albina; Avita, with her husband Turcius; Aproninus and their two children, Eunomia and Asterius; Æmilius, the Bishop of Beneventum; these, with Paulinus and Therasia, formed a choir of elect souls, or, as the poet gracefully expresses it, a lyre of ten strings in perfect harmony of thought and feeling. Avita was a niece of the

elder Melania, and a cousin of the deceased Publicola. Her husband Aproninus was a noble senator, and had been converted from paganism to the Christian faith. This perfect Christian laid aside his senator's robes for garments of rough frieze, and with his family led a life which resembled that of the monks in its fervent piety. Their daughter Eunomia, a consecrated virgin, was second cousin to Melania, who had trained her in every virtue, and guided her footsteps in the path of perfection. Eunomia's brother, Asterius, following his sister's example, had renounced the glory and wealth of his ancestral inheritance, and like another Samuel had dedicated himself to the service of the Most High. Finally, Æmilius, a scion of the illustrious house of that name, and the father of a family, was now a distinguished prelate of the Church. We shall soon see him called from that happy circle to proceed to Constantinople, there, as Papal Legate, to plead the cause of the persecuted Chrysostom at the Court of Theodosius. Such were the guests whom Paulinus had gathered around him.

The distance of fifteen centuries which separates us from that time hinders us from studying very closely the angelical life which was led by the band assembled at Nola—a life of fraternal charity, of golden simplicity, of such serene peace as we can scarcely imagine in these unquiet days.

Miserable garments, poor food, consisting of herbs and vegetables from the garden of Paulinus, but minds filled with thoughts of God, hearts overflowing with joy, abundance of occupation, prayer in common, the study of the Scriptures, and manual labour, their conversation ever holy and ever cheerful. Let us for a moment, in imagination, join that holy company on a calm night in the January of the year of which we are speaking. A clear and brilliant sky studded with stars spreads like the fringe of the mantle of the Most High extended over that cenacle of saints. Suddenly the shrill crow of the cock is heard, and the two communities file modestly before us, followed by the noble guests, who are escorted by Paulinus and Therasia. Over the triple entrance to the new Basilica, the cross ensanguined with the Precious Blood of the Divine Redeemer and crowned with a garland of flowers reminds them that by that cross they must die to the world, and so carry off the crown. *Tolle crucem qui vis auferre coronam.* The doors are opened and reveal the interior of the Basilica in all its splendour. The triple apse, *trichora*, lined with marble, and the vault above refulgent with mosaics and gold, while in the gloom of night mystical light falls on the altar, which is covered with the richest cloths. Over the altar is raised the symbolic cross, with the crown and monogram of Christ wrought in gold

and rare gems. The sanctuary is lighted by three golden lamps, which are hung by chains at each corner. Placed against the pillars are many coloured waxen tapers, whose perfumed wicks diffuse the sweetest fragrance. From the golden roof in the nave, suspended by chains of bronze, hang numerous lamps of silver and crystal, with branches elaborately wrought in the form of flowers and fruit ; their tremulous light is reflected from the clear surface of the columns and from the marble walls on which scenes from the Old Testament are reproduced with vivid colouring in all the symbolic idealism of Christian art. Through the echoing arches now resound the sweet singing of the choirs of virgins and youths, in which intermingle the deeper notes of those saintly patricians who have renounced the world with all its pomp and luxury. But in that outpouring of praise from hearts enamoured of God, Melania's voice soars in thrilling sweetness above all the rest. She is the mistress and the leader of the psalmody, and under her direction, *sub principe voce*, that chant ascends to heaven in strains of such ravishing sweetness as to resemble more the outpourings of an angelic choir than the song of mortals.

Paulinus seems rapt in ecstasy ; from time to time he glances upwards at the symbolic mosaics of the apse, which are his own conception. There before him he sees the Hand of the Almighty

stretched from heaven and scattering the clouds ; the holy dove of the Divine Paraclete, and the Mystic Lamb surrounded with dazzling light. In the centre is the cross of our redemption, sprinkled with the Precious Blood of the Divine Victim, and grouped around we may recognize the twelve Apostles, who are to proclaim the Gospel to the world, represented here by twelve doves, together with the palm-branch symbolic of their triumph. Four streams issuing from a rock beneath represent the sources of Gospel Truth and of grace. As the strains of the nocturnal psalmody rise sweeter and higher, Paulinus becomes rapt in ecstatic prayer. As he gazes with eyes of love at the Lamb, that symbolic figure of Christ seems to warm into life and to exult with delight at the sound of Melania's pure voice and that of her pupil Eunomia :

*Eunomiam hinc Melani doctam sub principe voce,  
Formantem modulis psalmorum vasa modestis,  
Auscultat gaudens dilecto Christus in agno.*

It would seem that Melania very much wished to make a long sojourn at Nola with all her household. So much can be inferred from certain expressions of Paulinus, from which, moreover, we gather that he greatly desired to keep them always with him as his guests, *sempiternos hospites*. This was due not only to his pleasant intercourse with them and to their edifying life, although

these afforded him such delight that he said in reference to them that they were the joy of heaven, *gaudia cœli*; but he desired their presence also because they were a perennial source of benefit to the poor and an example of all virtue to the rich. However, it is certain that the end of the year 408 found Melania and her family once more settled in her Roman country house, because it was from there that they set out for Sicily, accompanied by Rufinus of Aquileia, who was then far advanced in years and very infirm. It was during the last months of the year 408 that the approach of the Goths threatened Rome with all the horrors of a siege. Fear of the barbarians, who knew no respect for women, urged Melania to retire to some place of safety, together with the band of virgins who lived under her roof and formed part of her household.

Rufinus was then an old friend of the family, one also who was much loved and esteemed by Paulinus. Melania's feelings of friendship for him would not allow her to leave him exposed to the dangers which threatened Rome and the surrounding Campagna; therefore she invited him to accompany them. He took with him as amanuenses to aid him in his literary labours a certain Donatus and also Ursacius, the brother of Exsuperantius, a bishop in Lucania. The party set sail for Sicily, probably from Ostia, and went



from Naples to Nola to take leave of Paulinus. Thence they passed to Messina, where they took up their residence in the magnificent villa belonging to Melania on the western shore of the straits, opposite Reggio. Here, in this enchanting spot, surrounded with scenes of surpassing beauty both by sea and land, the band of saintly Christians continued their daily routine of prayer and good works. They profited much by the learned and edifying conversation of Rufinus, who urged them to still greater efforts of virtue. Meanwhile Melania was occupied in disposing of her remaining property, the proceeds of which she distributed, as usual, in alms and other corporal works of mercy.

But after the taking of Rome by Alaric, the barbarian invaders marched upon Southern Italy, devastating Latium, Campania, and the other regions through which they passed. They advanced to the very extremity of the Italian peninsula, occupying Reggio, which, together with its enchanting suburbs, they laid waste with fire and sword. As Melania, from the opposite shore, beheld these awful scenes, how fervently she must have returned thanks to God who had saved her from unknown and terrible danger. At the same time how her tender heart must have grieved for the victims of these awful excesses and for the irreparable ruin of her native land.

Then it was that those who had erstwhile traduced and insulted Melania, now scourged by the fierce Goth and despoiled of the greater part of their wealth, were cured of their blind folly, and lauded the wisdom of the saintly heroine who had in good time saved her patrimony from Alaric and disposed of it to far greater advantage.

Meanwhile Rufinus, bowed beneath the weight of years and stricken with an affection of the eyes, laid aside his pen and, surrounded with the most loving care, calmly and sweetly slept in the Lord. During his stay in Sicily this venerable old man, almost an octogenarian, completed the translation of the Homilies of Origen on the Book of Numbers.

We can hardly doubt that it was the still present fear of the barbarian invaders which drove Melania from Sicily to seek a safer refuge in lands still more remote. Africa, separated as it was from Europe by the Mediterranean, was at that time regarded by the terrified Romans as the general asylum of fugitives. Many Roman families had already betaken themselves to Carthage, and Melania was persuaded to follow their example. A further inducement to do so was offered by the fact that, having already disposed of her possessions in Italy and Sicily, she now wished to sell those which were scattered throughout the African provinces. The death of Rufinus ren-

dered any further delay in the projected departure unnecessary ; wherefore, in the month of December, after two years' sojourn in Messina, she embarked for Carthage. Her deep affection for Paulinus caused her to desire greatly to see him once more before undertaking a journey which would for many years, perhaps for ever, deprive her of a similar opportunity. She had particular reasons which urged her very strongly to pay this visit. She wished, in the first place, to console Paulinus for all the sufferings which he had endured from the barbarians. After the occupation of Rome, the Goths invaded Campania, pillaged Nola, and even laid sacrilegious hands upon the saintly bishop. St. Augustine alludes to this in his *De civitate Dei* (i. 10). These events must have taken place shortly before the burning of Reggio, and Melania's subsequent resolution to pass over into Africa. But, above all, Melania desired to congratulate Paulinus upon his election by the clergy and people to the see of Nola, and to receive from him for the first time the episcopal benediction. Paulinus was raised to the episcopal dignity shortly before the taking of Rome. Accordingly, when Melania and her household set sail, it was arranged that they should first proceed to Naples, whence she would journey by land to Nola.

The ship had scarcely left the straits when a

violent storm arose, which placed the lives of the travellers in the utmost danger. So great was the violence of the tempest that even the sailors were filled with fear. They thought they recognized in the fierce war of the elements a certain manifestation of Divine wrath, and cried aloud in their terror : " It is a judgment of God ! " But here assuredly man's dull perceptions were at fault. Human foresight was too limited to discern in that violent disturbance of nature a merciful dispensation of Divine Providence, which willed that Melania should be the instrument of God's loving mercy. This terrible gale thus encountered in December on the route to Naples must have been a strong *scirocco*, the *Eurus* of the Latins. To add to the general despair, water for drinking purposes ran short. In these trying circumstances Melania's serene calm was undisturbed. As if inspired from on high, she addressed the sailors, saying that perhaps God did not will that they should continue their course to Naples ; let them abandon the vessel to the guidance of the winds. They had scarcely done so when the scirocco drove them rapidly towards a small island, probably one of the *Æolian* group, and which, if this be so, from the fact of it being an episcopal see, could be no other than Lipari. As they drew near the island a frightful scene was presented to the travellers : the whole island

resounded with cries and lamentations. A host of barbarian pirates had surrounded the place and taken captive men, women, and children, for whom they brutally demanded ransom, threatening in the event of refusal to put their captives to the sword and to set fire to the settlement. Scarcely had the news spread of the arrival of the vessel with Melania, whose fame had reached even this remote spot, when the bishop and the chief men of the place appeared before her and piteously entreated her to save them by paying the sum of money demanded as ransom.

Melania was deeply moved. Her generous heart, ever on fire with tender charity, at once responded to the appeal. Without the least hesitation she gave the required sum, amounting to 1,500 pieces of gold, to which she added an additional sum for the relief of these unhappy people's wants, making in all a weight of specie which would be the equivalent of some 12,000 English sovereigns.\* Further, hearing that they were suffering from famine, she ordered everything of the best from the ship's supplies to be given to them. But her generosity was not yet satisfied. She learned that these cruel miscreants had carried off a noble matron whom they retained as their captive, hidden no one knew

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\* Of course, the purchasing power of this amount of the precious metal would be enormously greater than at the present day.

where. Melania at once offered a ransom of 500 gold pieces for her release. The money was accepted, and the lady was restored to her family. We may venture to discern in all this the true meaning of the storm which the short-sighted sailors in their despair had regarded as a sure indication of God's vengeance.

Melania, inexpressibly happy at having been the means by which these people's misery was relieved, resumed her journey. She reached Carthage without further incident. The great house of the Valerii was well known in those parts, not only because of their enormous possessions, but also because of the many members of the family who had filled the highest offices in the administration. But, more than all, the name was known as that of the illustrious woman, the fame of whose deeds had spread everywhere, awakening in all hearts profound admiration of her heroism.

We have no more convincing proof of the great esteem in which Melania was held than that afforded by the action of St. Augustine, the greatest man in all Africa, nay, rather, the greatest man of his age. Directly he received the news of Melania's arrival he wrote a most affectionate letter of welcome, and expressed his great regret that the imperative duties of his ministry and the rigours of the winter season prevented him from greeting her in person.

But all the respect and all the admiration of which she was the object never disturbed our saint's humility. She shrank from earthly applause as she would have shunned her worst enemy. Whatever inducements Carthage might otherwise have offered as a residence, she was aware that the licentiousness introduced by those patrician families whom the barbarian invasion had driven there made the city a centre of corruption. Besides, the noise and bustle of town life were distasteful to her. The same objections applied to Hippo, although the fact of it being the residence of that bishop who was so great a luminary of the Church would naturally have attracted her to it. But Hippo was a densely-populated Roman colony—a riotous, noisy city, repugnant to all her tastes and inclinations. She preferred, therefore, to retire to one of the most remote parts of Numidia, and took up her abode in Tagaste. Here she could not only live in obscure retirement, but at the same time enjoy the friendship of the learned and saintly bishop Alypius, who was an intimate friend of St. Augustine. His close intimacy with Paulinus must also have rendered his presence very consoling to one who loved Paulinus so dearly.

Once settled in her new home, Melania proceeded to dispose of the enormous estates and other property which she possessed in pro-consular

Africa, in Numidia, and in Mauretania. These were about the last remnants of that royal inheritance of which the heiress of the greatest house in Rome was despoiling herself in order to assume the garb of poverty and to enrol herself among the poor and the outcasts of society. The enormous sums of money which she received were quickly dispensed in the furtherance of every good work. She looked upon that wealth as an intolerable burthen, or, to speak more accurately, as representing the sharp thorns of the Gospel parable. She assigned a certain proportion of this money to the East, the remainder was devoted to the various provinces of Africa. A letter of St. Augustine's still remains to us to attest that the city of Hippo participated in Melania's bounty. In short, the whole of her patrimony in Africa was lavishly spent either in the relief of those unhappy beings who languished in captivity or in the maintenance of monasteries and churches. We can form some idea of Melania's other generous bounties when we read what she did for the church in Tagaste, which was miserably poor. In her ardent zeal for the Divine worship she embellished and adorned the sacred edifice, furnishing it with the precious vessels in gold and silver, and with altar-cloths richly embroidered in gold and thickly sewn with pearls. Further, she endowed this church with



extensive property which included a great portion of the town itself. Besides this, she acted with similar generosity towards the other churches and monasteries in Africa. On the recommendation of the principal bishops, St. Augustine, Alypius, and Aurelius of Carthage, she assigned to the monasteries a settled income, which rendered them independent of precarious alms-giving. In fact, she seems to have carried out unhesitatingly all that was suggested to her by these venerable prelates. But the crown of all her good works was the foundation of two new monasteries, one for men and one for women. These foundations were of a special and distinctive character, and were the outcome of the highest form of charity, which throws into brilliant relief the influence exercised by Christianity in the alleviation of slavery. These two large monasteries were founded and endowed by Melania for her own freedmen and handmaidens. They afforded accommodation for eighty men and 130 women. By such delicate expedients were the souls of these hitherto despised beings gradually elevated and ennobled, not only in the moral and religious order, but also in the eyes of the world, which now, for the first time, beheld masters and servants leading in common a life of perfect equality. Such isolated action was far, no doubt, from being a final settlement, but it at least heralded the

dawn of a complete social transformation in the ancient Roman world.

We have now reached a stage in the history of our Saint when it becomes necessary to call attention to one of the most striking features of her life. She was an ardent apostle of monasticism and of virginity as they were practised in the first Christian centuries. She not only herself professed this mode of life, but laboured also to propagate it. We may say, without fear of error, that Melania, her whole life long, shows herself deeply penetrated with the spirit of retirement, of prayer, of poverty, of humility, of mortification ; she was filled with an ardent love of virginal chastity, and felt within her soul an urgent need to infuse her spirit into other souls, so as to rescue them from the all-pervading corruption of that age. Hence it was that she became the foundress of monasteries and the wise instructress of virgins. In her loving, gracious manner she exhorts the nuns and women of her time never to grow weary of repeating, " Life is short ; why, then, degrade our bodies, which are the temples of God ? Why defile the chastity in which Christ has His dwelling ? He so honoured virginity that when He became the world's Redeemer, He chose to be born of a virgin."

These sentiments did not arise in her from any littleness or narrowness of soul ; nor from any

sufferings or disappointments which might have disgusted her with the things of the world. She occupied such an exalted position in society that she might have reigned over it as a queen. It was rather her own moral and intellectual virility which prompted her, amidst the universal corruption of that age, to seek a mode of life which was more consonant with the dignity of man's nature, and better fitted to prepare the way for a much-needed social reformation. In the asceticism of monastic life, modelled as it was on the Gospel, she found her ideal realised both in conception and in fact. Hence it was that the monastery to her was an ark in which safety was to be found from the contamination of a new sort of deluge of moral evil; a kind of earthly Paradise of chosen souls; a fountain of pure life from which the soul might drink and gain strength to trample on all that was base, and to soar ever higher; in fine, a new gymnasium for spiritual athletes, who, by continual self-discipline, might tame reluctant nature, and succeed in making the earth a stepping-stone to Heaven. Thus her keen vision, rendered clearer by Divine light, enabled her to foresee that in those peaceful abodes should be trained the militia whose work it would be in the inevitable conflict with barbarism and the imminent downfall of the Roman Empire to transform the barbarian invaders, to reform society, and to civilize the Christian world.

Mention must be made here, however briefly, of an incident which occurred after Melania and Pinianus had fixed their abode in Tagaste, an incident which still further illustrates the veneration in which both were held. Accompanied by the holy bishop Alypius, Melania and her husband went to visit Augustine, at Hippo. Scarcely was their arrival known in the city when an extraordinary enthusiasm was displayed by all classes. They went together to the church to assist at the Divine Mysteries. The celebrant had reached the offertory when there arose a low murmur from the people, which gradually swelled into a sound like thunder. The whole congregation were crying aloud to Augustine to impose his hands on Pinianus and ordain him priest of their church. Both Augustine and Pinianus resisted, but they could not calm the excited populace. The tumult grew greater and more terrifying. Entreaties were followed by threats, and from threats they proceeded to insults, directed specially against Alypius, whom they regarded as the prime mover in the resistance to their wishes, from his desire to keep Pinianus at Tagaste. It was feared that the agitators would proceed to actual violence, and to allay the general excitement, Pinianus was forced to swear that he would remain at Hippo, and also that if at any time he should decide to enter the priesthood, he would

be ordained in no other church. Such were the terms upon which calm was eventually restored.

Melania remained in Africa for seven years, living amongst the consecrated virgins who were once her slaves, but who now and for ever were to be treated as her sisters. She practised such severe penance that it seems almost incredible that a woman of delicate constitution, reared in all the luxury and refinement of a patrician house, could have endured such a life. Her garments were of haircloth, and at night she snatched a few brief moments of rest on the hard ground—her only bed. Her sole diet consisted of herbs or vegetables prepared with a little oil or a few drops of hydromel. Even this poor fare was only partaken of once a day, and not until evening. By degrees she accustomed herself to remain without food for still longer periods, until at last she was able to forgo all nourishment for a week together, from the Sunday to the following Saturday, passing the whole of Lent in this most rigorous observance of the fast. In the great heats of the summer, the only sustenance she allowed herself after prolonged abstinence from food, was a few figs. It may be truly said that her prayer was continual; she recited the Divine Office daily with her community, to which she added long private devotions. Her days were passed in strictest silence and recollection—each hour being

fully occupied. A certain portion of every day was devoted to manual labour. Melania's own principal employment consisted in transcribing manuscripts, a task which she performed with the greatest ease and accuracy in Greek and Latin, writing from the dictation of one of the community, whose smallest mistake she instantly corrected. The money obtained from these works was spent in clothing the poor, whose feet Melania also washed. So late as the tenth century, codices were in circulation containing works of the Fathers of the Church which had been transcribed by the hand of Saint Melania. Special hours were also assigned to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, which she read through from beginning to end four times during the year. She also carefully studied the treatises of the Fathers, whose works she eagerly sought out, and with all of which she was well acquainted, as far as it was possible to obtain them. To these she added the reading of the Lives of the Saints. Two hours were all that Melania allowed herself for sleep, at the end of which she arose promptly to call her companions to renewed prayer and labour. With such fortitude and constancy, worthy of a martyr, did she expiate the licentiousness and sensuality of Roman life. Many a time her mother, anxious to relieve her daughter's loneliness, sought her little cell, only to find her so intent upon the duty

of the hour, that she could not coax a word from her—not even a look. We cannot wonder that this mother, recalling the mother of the Macchabees, should declare herself also blessed by a sort of martyrdom. Surely if the latter has eternal joy in Heaven for having witnessed for one day the sufferings of her children, how much greater must be the reward of her who suffered the daily martyrdom of beholding her delicately-nurtured child chastise her body so severely, and refuse to allow herself the least respite from continual labour and mortification. Hence it was that Albina, even amid her tears, offered perpetual thanks to God for having bestowed upon her so saintly a daughter.

There is nothing which illustrates more strikingly the impression which Melania's disinterestedness and asceticism produced upon her generation than the testimony of the historian Palladius in his famous chronicle of early Eastern asceticism, best known as the *Historia Lausiaca*. It is especially remarkable because this glowing account of Melania's great renunciation was penned during her lifetime, when she was not yet forty years old. Palladius had visited her in 405, fifteen years before his account was written; while Bishop Lausus, to whom his book was dedicated and from whom it derived its name, was her intimate friend. The account begins thus :

“Now inasmuch as I have already promised above to relate the history of Melania the younger, it is meet that I should discharge my obligation, for it is not just that I should consign to oblivion a noble lady who, though so very young in her years, by reason of her indefatigable zeal and knowledge is much wiser than the old women, or that I should omit to make manifest by word the history of one who though a girl in stature is old in the mind of the fear of God.”

We need not dwell again on the story of her marriage, and the death of her children, but we may pass to the compendious account which is given of her renunciation, and the distribution of her property.

“First of all she bestowed all her raiment of silk upon the holy altars, which also did Olympias the handmaiden of Christ, and the remainder of her apparel of silk she cut up and made it suitable for the service of the church in other ways. Her silver and gold she entrusted to a priest whose name was Paul, who was a monk from Dalmatia, and she sent it by sea to the countries of the East, I mean to Egypt and the Thebaïd, to the amount of ten thousand darics ; and she sent in this manner ten thousand darics to Antioch and to the countries which were nigh thereunto, but to Palestine she sent fifteen thousand darics. To the churches which were within the islands and to



the people who were in exile she sent ten thousand darics ; and to those who were in the West, I mean in the churches and in the monasteries there, and in the houses for the reception of strangers, and to all those who were in want she distributed her gifts with her own hand. And I speak as before God when I say that she must have given away four times these amounts besides, and that by her faithful stewardship she snatched away her money from Alaric as from the mouth of a lion. Of those who wished to be free among her slaves she gave freedom to about 8,000 in number, and on the remainder who had no wish to have their freedom and who preferred rather to remain in the service of her brother she bestowed three thousand darics. All the villages she had in Spain and in Aquitania and in the island of Tarragon and Gaul, she sold, as well as those she had in Sicily and in Campania and in Africa, and received the proceeds thereof in her own hands so that she might give them to the monasteries and churches, and all those who were in want. Such was the wisdom of Melania, this lover of Christ, and such was the mature and divine opinion which she adopted in respect of the weighty burden of these riches."

It is curious that Melania's later biographer mentions Britain also among the countries where his beloved mistress had property which she dis-

posed of. This must have been but a year or two before the date when the Roman legions were withdrawn from this outlying province of the empire. But to return to Palladius :

“Her manner of life [he continues] was thus. She herself ate every other day, though at the beginning she only ate once in five days,\* and the young women whom she had converted and who lived with her she commanded to partake of food every day. And there lives with her also her mother Albina, who observes the same rule of life, and who distributes her possessions amongst the needy after the manner of Melania, and sometimes they dwell in the plains of Sicily and sometimes in the plain of Campania, and they have with them fifteen men who are eunuchs and a proportionate number of virgins who minister as servants.

“And Pinianus who was once her husband now helps in the work of ascetic excellence and is her associate, and he dwells with three hundred men who are monks and who read the Holy Scriptures, and he employs himself in the garden and converses with the people. Now these men who are with him helped us and relieved us in no slight degree, and we were very many in

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\* It seems that Melania began by trying to go without food for five days at a time. But this was too much for her strength in the beginning, though at a later date she did more than this. Palladius is here speaking of the year 405.

number, when we were going on our way to Rome, on behalf of the blessed man, John the Bishop [*i.e.*, St. John Chrysostom], for they received us with the greatest good-will and they supplied us with provisions for the way in great abundance and they sent us on our road in joy and gladness."†

As for the spirit in which Melania regarded her own good works, we cannot do better than quote a little speech of hers recorded for us by her faithful disciple and biographer, Gerontius :

"One day, when certain of the virgins who were with her had asked her if perchance in her practice of asceticism and virtue she had not been tempted by the devil to vain glory, she, to the edification of us all, began to speak thus:—'To say the truth, I am not, indeed, conscious of any good in myself. Nevertheless, if I ever perceived that the enemy, on account of my fasting, suggested thoughts of pride to me I would answer him : What great thing is it that I should fast for a week when others for forty whole days do not taste oil, others do not even allow themselves water? So if the enemy suggested to me to be proud of my poverty, I, trusting in the Divine Power, would strive to confound his malice. How many, taken as captives by the barbarians, are

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† The Translation, from the Syriac, *The Book of the Paradise of Palladius*, by Dr. E. Wallis Budge, has here been borrowed with a few modifications.

deprived even of their liberty, and how many falling under the wrath of kings are, by the loss both of wealth and of life, deprived of everything at once? And how many also find themselves poor through the fault of their own parents; others, caught in the snares of thieves and calumniators, are reduced unexpectedly from riches to poverty. It is no great thing, therefore, if we should trample on earthly goods for those which are everlasting and incorruptible. Then, when again I perceived that the Evil One suggested to me thoughts of vain glory, because after the many robes of silk and fine linen I put on hair-cloth, regarding myself as very wretched I would transport myself in thought to those who lie on mats in the forum naked and benumbed with cold, and in this way God would drive the devil from me.' And she added that the snares of the devil were manifest, but that her greatest difficulties and temptations came from her fellow men. 'To me it happened mostly in the time of greatest trouble that the devil raised up men having the appearance of Saints, who, observing that I studied to fulfil literally the word of God Who says to the rich: If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me (Matt. xix. 21), raised objection and said to me: "Certainly it is fitting that some should serve the Lord in poverty and in an ascetic life,

but this should always be in moderation." But I considered those who in this world fight for mortal princes, how longing for promotion, they confront danger even unto death. If therefore those for earthly glory, which is as the grass of the field, strove so laboriously, how much more should I labour in order to acquire greater honour in Heaven?'"

## Ascetical Life at Jerusalem.

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A.D. 417—439.

ALEXANDRIA.—Melania settles in Jerusalem.—Conferences with Paula and St. Jerome.—Visit to Egypt.—The Cell on the Mount of Olives.—Death of Albina and Pinianus.—Melania and her community of Virgins. — Visit to Constantinople. — Conversion of Volusianus. — The Empress Eudoxia at Jerusalem.—Melania's last days.

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LET us now go back to our narrative in the year 417. The moment had at last come when Melania could leave the soil of Africa, and gratify her longing to go to Palestine, whither she was drawn by her ardent desire to visit the Holy Places. She embarked with Albina and Pinianus at Carthage, and two days later found herself at Alexandria. Melania, as ever, filled with the spirit of lowliness and humility, wished to remain unknown, and looked forward to spending a few days in the city in the obscurity of some poor lodging. But her pious wishes were not to be gratified. Her name had become so venerated amongst Christians that they everywhere esteemed themselves happy to offer her hospitality. Thus it was that a surprise awaited Melania in the prosperous capital of Lower Egypt. St. Cyril

was at that time Patriarch of that important see, and the greatest and most learned of the Eastern bishops. And now this luminary of the Church received St. Melania with all possible honour, and insisted that during her stay in Alexandria she should be his guest. Although we cannot form any clear idea of what passed between these two great and most gifted souls, so filled with the spirit of God, it can hardly be doubted that this meeting drew them together in the closest bonds of friendship.

After a brief sojourn at Alexandria, the travelers proceeded direct to Jerusalem, their final destination. Scarcely had they reached their journey's end when they hastened to prostrate themselves before the spots consecrated by the memories of our Redemption, eager to draw from thence a deeper love for the poverty and humility of the Crucified. Melania had only brought an insignificant sum of money with her to Jerusalem, but she did not hesitate to distribute this small remnant of her vast inheritance amongst the poor of the Holy City. In order to conceal her charity, and thus avoid the least breath of worldly applause, she secretly remitted the money to the deacons charged with the care of the poor. Further, she wished to have her own name and those of her companions inscribed on the list of those poor people of Jerusalem who were recipients of the

Church's charity. She abstained, however, from this course, probably from delicacy of conscience, not wishing to deprive others of their share of alms. In the end she abandoned herself wholly to the care of Divine Providence.

Melania, with her mother, took up her abode in a little cell of the common hospice for pilgrims, close to the Church of the Resurrection, while Pinianus, it seems, was separated from them, the men being lodged in a place apart from the women. Here, then, in the heart of Jerusalem, and flooded with the luminous rays from our Lord's Cross and Sepulchre, Melania's soul was consumed more and more with the fire of Divine Love. Buried in obscurity, and enjoying the most complete self-effacement, she found her delight in continual fasting, in unwearied prayer, in loving and assiduous study of the Holy Scriptures. Her brief rest was taken on the hard ground, covered only with little mats of rough hair-cloth. When the shadows of evening fell, and the custodians at the end of the vesper office closed the gates of Constantine's Basilica, it was a beautiful and touching sight to behold Melania go forth alone from her little cell, and prostrate herself before the doors of the Sanctuary, there to pass the night in prayer and vigil until they were opened again at cock-crow in the morning. The severe and prolonged fasts, with other austerities,



brought on an illness during which it was with great difficulty that the Saint was prevailed upon to accept a pillow upon which to rest her aching head.

In Palestine Melania had the happiness of meeting her dearly-loved cousin, Paula. Paula, who was the daughter of Albina's sister, Læta, lived in a monastery at Bethlehem, of which her aunt, Julia Eustochium, was the prioress, having succeeded her mother, Saint Paula, in that office. These two holy and illustrious women must, without doubt, have been constant and assiduous in their visits to their saintly relative. It was through them, as well as by means of her mother, that Melania had the happiness of cultivating such filial relations with St. Jerome during the last three years of his life. We cannot suppose that the venerable old man at Bethlehem was a stranger to Melania, or that he hesitated to communicate his expositions of the hidden meanings of the Inspired Books to so sympathetic a listener. Our Saint's biographer relates that notwithstanding the strict seclusion in which she lived, she occasionally received visits from the greatest and most distinguished amongst the bishops and Fathers of the Church. It is practically certain that amongst these Saint Jerome must have held the foremost place. Moreover, we can gather from a letter written in 418 by the holy Doctor, after the

death of the virgin Eustochium, to Saint Augustine and Alypius, how intimate was his friendship with Saint Melania. In this letter he makes himself the mouthpiece of Melania's affectionate greetings conjointly with those of Albina and Pinianus, all of whom the holy Doctor calls his children. One sentence of Melania's biographer vividly describes her reverence for the illustrious Father of the Church, and shows with what profound humility she received his visits. "She advanced," he says, "to meet him with her usual modest, respectful demeanour, and prostrating herself at his feet, humbly begged his blessing."

The fame of sanctity which surrounded as with an aureole the monasteries of Egypt, and the marvellous stories told of these celebrated anchorets by those who had visited them, could not fail to make a profound impression on our Saint. There awoke within her an ardent desire to behold these marvels herself, and to learn fresh methods of advancing in the path of perfection. She would fain acquire more burning zeal from the luminous example of these holy anchorets and virgins, and at the same time obtain the benefit of their prayers. And, behold, a favourable opportunity presented itself, which at the same time brought into clearer relief her inexhaustible charity and entire detachment from everything earthly. The invasion of the barbarians had

prevented her from selling some remaining estates in Spain, especially in the province of Taragona. The Suevi, the Huns, and the Vandals, having overrun Gaul, crossed the Pyrenees and invaded the Iberian peninsula, which they divided amongst themselves, and devastated in every possible way. Towards the close of the year 410, Ataulfus, with his Visigoths, tried to drive them out and to free the country from the scourge, but without avail. He was succeeded by Wallia, who began his career by restoring Placidia, Ataulfus's widow, who had remained a prisoner in his people's hands, to her brother Honorius, and in 418 he concluded a treaty of peace with the Emperor of the West. Order having been restored, Melania was thus enabled to send one of the most trusted of her freedmen into Spain that he might dispose of whatever property remained to her. On receipt of the money, Melania resolved to undertake, in company with Pinianus, the long-desired pilgrimage to Egypt, the chief end of which was to visit the monasteries, and with her own hand distribute her offerings amongst the holy inmates. And here we have in the Saint's biography a striking contrast afforded to us. On the one hand we have the charity of Melania who, loving poverty, wished to give all and retain nothing ; whilst on the other there is presented to us the Gospel spirit of those true followers of Christ who refuse

to accept what is proffered beyond their immediate need. One of the most delightful incidents in the Saint's biography, by reason of its exquisite simplicity, is her encounter with the anchoret Hephæstion. It is thus that Gerontius tells the story :

“And seeing that it was always her special devotion to be solicitous for the relief of others, they came once upon a time, as she herself vouchsafed to tell us, to a certain most holy man named Hephæstion. And when they had entered his cell, our Saint, after they had prayed together, began to beg of him that he would vouchsafe to accept at their hands a few gold pieces for his own use. Whereupon he, starting to his feet, began to thrust away from him the proffered money, declaring that he had no need of gold for any purpose. When, therefore, no persuasions could induce him to take it, they asked, as the custom is, that he would offer a prayer for them before they set out on their journey again. He assented, and while he, falling prone upon his face, prayed for them to our Lord, our Saint peered about to see where she could secretly leave the money which he rejected. Nothing offered itself for such a purpose, because there was no property of any kind in the cell which the hermit could call his own, except the mat on which he slept, and in the corner a basket with a

few little loaves and a vessel of salt. This the Blessed Melania managed at last to discover, and hid in it a few coins. Then, thanking him for his prayer, they hastily departed for fear the servant of God might find the money and give it back. They therefore, having hurried away as fast as they could go, the man of God on his side began to reflect on the importunity of his visitors in pressing him to accept the gift. Whereupon, conceiving a suspicion and making search, he straightway found what had been hidden ; and so picking up the money he followed the holy couple at the top of his speed. Thus, just as they had crossed the river and had reached the further shore, he came to the bank, and shouting out, said : ‘ Tell me, I pray, why have you left with me in the desert this money which I need not ? ’ And the holy woman replied : ‘ Be pleased to give it to the poor ; for the Lord has vouchsafed to grant my desire.’ And he in turn : ‘ Where shall I go, or how am I to find poor people, seeing that I never quit the desert ? Do you rather take it back and give it to others.’ And so when in no wise she could be persuaded to take back what had once been given, and he was unable to cross the river, he flung the money which he held in his hands into the stream, and there it went to the bottom. This indeed was a favourite practice of hers, to give secret alms in

this way to those monks and nuns who would receive nothing. She was possessed with an eager longing that all whom she saw should receive gifts at her hands, for she knew that from such deeds of charity her soul reaped no little advantage."

It must have been an edifying sight to behold Melania, in company with Pinianus, making the tour of Egypt, visiting the monasteries and the cells peopled with cenobites, anchorets, and virgins, and conversing with those most famous for sanctity in these places. It is worthy of remark that these aged men, consummate masters in sanctity, all recognized in Melania a true heroine of virtue, gifted with virile understanding. They invoked a thousand blessings upon her, and at her departure, accompanied her in troops for many miles of her way. They would seem to have regarded her as a true mother.

This visit to the monasteries of Egypt must have taken place in the autumn, for we find that the return journey was made in the midst of all the rigours of winter. The travellers suffered much discomfort owing to the severity of the season. Melania established herself again in Jerusalem, greatly fortified in soul by her visit to Egypt, and with increased thirst for mortification. Before leaving the Holy City she had begged her mother to have constructed for her a small rustic

cell on the summit of Mount Olivet, where she could practise a more entire recollection in prayer. The sacred mount, so suited for contemplation, was already studded with cells and monasteries. The good Albina, in accordance with her daughter's wishes, had prepared such a refuge as she had suggested. Thither Melania retired after the Feast of the Epiphany, taking with her one companion, and there she remained until Easter in the strictest seclusion, doing penance in sackcloth and ashes, observing the most rigid fast, and absorbed in prayer. She saw no one except her mother and Pinianus, who came on certain days, and her cousin Paula, to whom she acted as guide in the practice of virtue.

For fourteen years after her return to Palestine, Melania continued to lead this more or less solitary life of prayer and penance, and then it pleased God to call to Himself the Saint's beloved mother, Albina. Melania caused her to be laid to rest in the sacred soil of Mount Olivet, and constructed a small oratory, close to her grave and not far from the Grotto where our Divine Lord used to assemble His Apostles. She then took up her permanent abode in the same spot, intending never to return to the city. Shut up in this obscure retreat, Melania remained near the tomb of her beloved mother, in fasting, in prayer and in tears. But the zeal which burned within her

breast knew no diminution, and it urged her once more to resume her apostolate for souls. We know not from what pious benefactors she received the money with which she built a monastery on Mount Olivet, with an adjoining oratory for the celebration of the Divine Mysteries. Here she gathered about ninety virgins, of whom she was the wise, enlightened, and tender instructress. It adds much to the value of the new biography of the Saint that in it we find preserved some few details of the admirable administration by means of which she infused her spirit into and maintained regular discipline amongst her subjects. Her rules were a model of wisdom, of discretion and of simplicity, embodying as they did the very essence of the ascetic doctrine of the Fathers which she had assimilated by constant study. It is, in truth, surprising to find with what unexampled moderation and benignity she, who was so harsh to herself, ruled over her community. Nothing was wanting to her subjects which was necessary or suitable. Contrary to the practice of the other monasteries of her time, she was careful that the religious over whom she ruled should have an abundant supply of fresh water. She even went so far as to provide a bath, to procure which she had recourse by letter to a rich Roman patrician living at Constantinople, formerly prefect of the palace under Arcadius and



Honorius II. This nobleman granted her request, and generously defrayed all expenses. She was most indulgent with regard to fasting, not only moderating the ardour of the more mortified, but also watching carefully over those whose delicacy of constitution rendered them unfit for severe fasts. To all she permitted a certain amount of liberty in the matter according to their strength. When the night office was over she insisted on each one retiring again to rest, and if she perceived that anyone was very much fatigued she dispensed her altogether from the vigil. Melania's modesty and humility would not allow her to assume the office of directress, and although elected by the unanimous vote of the community, she contrived that another should act as prioress. At the same time, she watched over all with maternal charity, making herself acquainted with each one's wants, and contriving that she should find in her cell whatever was necessary to her. All this was done in such a manner as to conceal her own intervention. It is not surprising, therefore, that Melania was the object of universal love and veneration.

As for the training she imparted to those who looked to her for guidance in the spiritual life, we cannot do better than quote at some length the account of her biographer. He says :

“ Although I am quite unable to give any idea

of the instructions filled with the Spirit of God which she continually imparted to her spiritual children, nevertheless I will try to say a few words about this matter. Her anxiety was always to instruct them concerning virtue and spiritual works, that they might present the virginity of their souls and bodies without stain to Christ, their Celestial Spouse. And before everything else, she impressed upon them how they should, at the night-office, unweariedly watch and warily guard against all bad thoughts, not allowing their minds to wander, but fixing their attention upon the Psalms. Then she would say: 'Consider, sisters, how the subjects of earthly and mortal princes wait upon them with all fear and attention, and with what fear and trembling ought we to fulfil our Divine Office in the presence of the tremendous Heavenly King. For you should remember that neither the angels nor any intelligent and heavenly beings whatsoever can worthily praise the Lord, Who has no need of, and is above all praise. If, therefore, the angelic powers, which so far transcend our nature, cannot, as we have said, praise God worthily for all things, how much more should we, useless servants, sing to Him in all fear and trembling, lest in place of reward and spiritual profit, we merit condemnation for our negligence in praising the Lord. Instructed by the Holy Scriptures, and directing our gaze upon Christ

our Lord, we should mutually observe sincere charity, for without spiritual charity all religious practice of virtue is vain, because all the good works which we think we do, the devil may, in truth, imitate, but he is completely overcome by charity and humility. For example, though we may fast, he never eats at all. Though we watch, he is absolutely sleepless. Let us, therefore, hate pride, for, by reason of it, he fell from Heaven, and by means of it he would drag us down below into the abyss with himself. So let us fly the vain glory of this world, which is as transitory as the grass of the field. Above all, let us maintain firmly the holy and orthodox faith, for this is the base and foundation of our whole life in the Lord ; and let the sanctification of soul and body be dear to us, for without this no one shall see God.' Then fearing that some of them taking pride in their excessive fasting might fall from grace, she told them that abstinence was the least of all the virtues. ' But,' she said, ' just as a bride who is attired with every ornament cannot wear black shoes, but must adorn her feet together with the rest of her person, so the soul which is adorned with every virtue must possess that of abstinence also. Hence, it is plain that, if anyone while destitute of the other virtues should try to attain perfection in abstinence, she would be like a bride who left her person unadorned but

lavished all her care upon her shoes.' She also often exhorted them to obey God, speaking thus : ' Without obedience, even public affairs in the world can have no stability, for worldly rulers themselves yield to one another, and govern by persuasion, and even if we speak of him who wears the crown, in affairs of great moment, he undertakes nothing until he has first asked the advice of the senate. Hence, in the houses of secular persons, if you took away the greatest good, obedience, you would take away all order, and there being no order, all that makes for peace would totter. We must, therefore, all practice obedience. Obedience consists in this, that you do that which displeases you in order to do the will of Him who commands, and that you do violence to yourself for His sake, who has said : The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and only the violent bear it away.' (Matt. xi. 12). And she related to them the anecdote of an old man, to show the necessity that those who live with others should bear everything which may happen to them. ' A person,' she said, ' went to a holy old man to be instructed by him, and the latter said to him : " Canst thou obey me in all things, for love of the Lord ? " And he answered the father, " Whatsoever thou shalt command me, that will I do with all care." " Then," replied the old man, " take a whip, and going to such a place,

beat and belabour the statue there." And he, having promptly executed what had been enjoined, returned, and the old man said to him, "Perhaps the statue which was beaten and struck, remonstrated and answered you back?" And the other replied, "No, not a word." "Go, therefore, again," said the old man, "beat the statue as before, and scold it well at the same time." And having done this three times, according to the father's orders, and the statue answering nothing (as indeed it could not do, being of stone), at last the old man said to him, "If thou canst become like that statue, which is ill-treated and bears no malice, is beaten and offers no resistance, thou wilt be able to save thy soul, and may remain with me." Therefore, daughters, let us also follow such an example, and bear all things bravely—injuries, insults, contempt—that we may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.' Meanwhile, with regard to continual fasting, she repeated the saying of the Apostle, '*Endure not with sadness or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver*' (2 Cor. ix. 7), and she left what they should do to the discretion of each one. However, concerning charity, humility, gentleness, and all other virtues, she said: 'It is not lawful for anyone to abuse either the stomach or other organ of the body, but every man is without excuse who does not follow the commandments of God. But I advise you to

fight with longanimity and patience, for it is by the narrow gate that the Saints enter Heaven ; the labour is, indeed, little, but great and eternal is the repose. Bear for a little while, that you may acquire the crown of justice. . . . It is not fitting that we should rise for the office of the night after we have satisfied ourselves with sleep, but we must force ourselves, that we may acquire the reward of our efforts in the life to come.' And when the office was over, she took care that they should have a little sleep, that by it they might recover from the fatigue of the vigil, and prepare their youthful bodies for the tasks of the following day."

That the Saint was essentially kind, especially to her own religious sisters, is sufficiently shown by a saying of hers recorded by her biographer. When it happened, every now and again, that one of them, having incurred her displeasure by some misconduct, afterwards came to ask her pardon, Melania would say, "The Lord knows that, unworthy as I am, I should not venture to compare myself with any good woman even of those living in the world ; yet I think that the enemy himself will not dare to accuse me at the Day of Judgment of ever having gone to sleep with bitterness in my heart." Yet the Saint could be stern on occasion, especially in any matter which touched the faith, as the following curious episode,

which we translate literally from the Latin version of the Life, plainly shows :

\*“There was [says the biographer] a certain matron of noble family who was sojourning in the Holy Places (at Jerusalem), although they said that she was a heretic. Still, she communicated (*i.e.*, assisted at our liturgy and received communion) with us, pretending to be a true believer. Now it happened that she came to die while remaining in these dispositions ; but I, in offering the Holy Sacrifice, named her name amongst those who had slept. For it was my custom, during those dread and solemn moments, not only to recite the names of the holy martyrs, that they might pray for me to our Lord, but also of sinners that had found mercy, that they too might intercede for me. So it happened that I named the matron above mentioned. Whereupon our most blessed mistress said to me in a tone of some indignation, ‘As the Lord liveth, my Father,

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\*The liturgical interest of this notice is considerable, for if we may trust the biography of Peter the Iberian (written seemingly in Greek but preserved to us only in Syriac) Gerontius followed the ancient Roman rite when he celebrated the Liturgy for St. Melania. Both from this and from another passage later on, it seems clear that the canon of the Mass was recited aloud. Moreover we gather that the Memento “of those who had slept” was introduced not that they might find mercy, but that they might intercede for the celebrant and those who took part in the sacrifice. This could hardly have been said by anyone who recited the Memento for the Dead in the form in which we find it in the Roman canon at present.

Another interesting liturgical detail preserved for us by the Life of St. Melania is the practice of kissing the bishop’s hand at the moment of receiving Holy Communion. Cardinal Rampolla has devoted an interesting appendix to this point, as also to the custom of administering the Eucharist at the very moment of death.

seeing you name such a one, I no longer communicate of your oblation.' And then when I pledged her my word that I would never name this woman in future, 'For all that,' she said again, 'since you have named her once, I do not communicate.'"

One point which undoubtedly contributes to inspire confidence in the narrative of the chaplain Gerontius, especially when we compare it with hagiographical documents of a somewhat later date, is the subordinate place allotted to the miraculous element. Melania is not brought before us as a great worker of miracles during her lifetime. None the less, her biographer undoubtedly claimed for his mistress the gift of miracles, as the following passage abundantly shows.

"And here," he declares, "I propose to make mention of a few amongst many miracles which the Lord worked through her means, for, on account of the number, and on account of my incapacity, I cannot declare them all. However, one day a very malignant devil took possession of a certain young woman, and shut her lips so tightly that for several days she could neither speak nor take nourishment. Thus she seemed in imminent danger of starving, many doctors having administered much medicine to her without ever succeeding in enabling her to open her



lips. When it had in this way been proved that the art of medicine was powerless to overcome the evil spirit, they finally carried her to the Saint, accompanied by her parents. But the Saint, refusing praise from men, said : ‘ In truth, being a sinner, I can do nothing ; but let us take her to the holy martyrs, and the God of clemency will cure her through their certain intercession.’ When they had arrived at the shrine, the Saint having earnestly invoked the Lord of all things, took some of the oil which was sanctified by the relics of the holy martyrs, and touched the sick woman’s mouth three times, saying with a loud voice, ‘ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, open thy mouth.’ And immediately, when God was thus invoked, the demon, confused and terrified, departed, and the woman opened her mouth. The Saint thereupon gave her food to eat, and all who saw it, breaking out into the praise of God, the woman who was cured went away with great joy. And another woman also who was seized with the same malady was healed by the Lord through the prayers of the Saint. Again, another woman was at the point of death in child-birth, and suffered terribly, not being able to give birth to the child. As soon as the servant of God heard this, she was greatly moved with compassion for the woman, and said to the virgins who were with her, ‘ Let us go to her who is in danger, that if

for no other reason than by considering the sorrows of those who live in the world, we may learn from how many excruciating afflictions God has rescued us.' When they reached the house where the woman lay in danger, she prayed, and suddenly the sick woman said to the Saint, with difficulty, in a weak, faint voice: 'Have pity on me.' And she, standing up with much and earnest importunity, prayed to God for her, and taking off the leather girdle which she wore, she placed it upon her, saying. 'I received this as an alms from a great servant of God, and I believe that his prayers will cure you at once.' Even as she was speaking the woman was delivered of the dead child." It was, so Melania insisted, the holiness of the ascetic to whom the girdle had previously belonged which wrought the miracle. For, as her biographer adds, "she always attributed her good works to the Saints."

But our Saint's burning thirst for the salvation of souls constantly urged her to still greater efforts. She laboured unceasingly to bring back all those who had strayed from the way of salvation. The power of her sweet persuasion induced many women who had sinned like Magdalen to imitate her in her sorrow for sin. Melania's biographer, in speaking of her zeal for souls, says it would not be possible to tell how many pagans, Samaritans, and heretics were con-

verted by her efforts. Pelagius was in Jerusalem when his condemnation was proclaimed, and we know for certain that Melania left nothing undone to induce him to return to the fold of Christ. She actually succeeded in getting him to make a declaration which would have fully satisfied all the exigencies of Catholic doctrine if the words which Pelagius used had not, in his mind, quite a different meaning from that which they seemed to convey.

Scarcely a year had passed since her mother's death when Melania experienced a fresh and very sharp trial. Towards the end of the year 431, or the beginning of 432, Pinianus was taken ill and passed to eternal rest. In her great sorrow Melania experienced supreme consolation. Those two who were dearest to her on earth, who had for so many years followed in her footsteps along the path of perfection, had reached their goal. She had resigned them into the hands of God who rewards the good. They had outstripped her in the race, and now, crowned with glory they awaited her in Paradise, whither she was hurrying with flying feet. But, meanwhile, she would show of what affection her heart was capable. She buried her husband near her mother's tomb on the Mount of Olives, and feeling that the bonds which united her to these beloved souls were now drawn closer than ever,

she remained beside them for four years, redoubling her austerities, her fasts, and her prayers. Truly, a supreme proof of how divine love purifies and strengthens the tide of human affection.

At the period of which we are speaking there existed on the Mount of Olives two famous sanctuaries which were venerated by all Christendom, namely, the Church built by Saint Helen on the spot where Our Lord ascended into Heaven, and Constantine's Basilica, erected over the grotto where, as we have already said, according to tradition, Our Divine Lord used to assemble His Apostles and where He discoursed to them concerning the end of the world. These two great memorial churches had no resident clergy attached to them, but were served by the secular clergy of Jerusalem, and owing probably to their remoteness from the city, did not receive the attention which was their due for the precious memories which they recalled. Divine worship was much neglected, and the diurnal and nocturnal offices had ceased altogether. Melania was deeply pained at such a state of things. She made repeated efforts to have it remedied, but always without avail. We know not if her failure was to be attributed to her extreme poverty, or to the want of faith amongst those to whom she appealed for aid. But at last God rewarded her. A wealthy and devout Christian sent her a large

sum of money to dispose of as she pleased. Melania at once sent for her chaplain, Gerontius, the same who wrote her life, and, giving him the money, charged him to set about the immediate erection of a monastery for men close to these sanctuaries. It was her wish that the chief duty of these monks should be the nightly chanting of the Divine Office in each of the churches in turn. She also desired that they should pray for the souls of her dear departed whose mortal remains lay close beside them. Melania's faith and zeal had their reward. Within the space of a year a large and much-admired monastery was erected, and she had the consolation of seeing it shortly afterwards inhabited by an edifying community of monks. Henceforth all the offices of the Church were reverently and assiduously carried out upon the Mount of Olives.

Melania, in her great joy at the realization of one of her most ardent desires, poured forth her soul in thanksgiving to God. But whilst thus rejoicing, an unexpected letter arrived which seems to have moved her deeply. The letter announced the arrival in Constantinople of her uncle, Volusianus, Albina's brother, as ambassador from Valentinian III. to treat concerning his marriage with Eudoxia, the daughter of Theodorus II. We cannot doubt that Volusianus expressed a strong desire to see his niece after such long years

of absence. This letter was written about November of the year 436. Two deep currents of feeling made themselves felt in Melania's soul at this intelligence. Volusianus was a near relative, and a man who by his splendid career passed in the highest offices of State and in the closest relations with the imperial family, had won universal esteem. Her natural affection for such a near kinsman urged her to gratify his desire. But the voice of charity appealed to her heart still more strongly than that of nature. She well remembered how unweariedly her saintly grandmother, the Christian wife of the pagan priest, Albinus, had laboured for the conversion of this illustrious man. She knew that Saint Augustine, too, had zealously worked for the same end. But Volusianus, in spite of all efforts, still adhered to Paganism. He was now far advanced in years, and there was but too much reason to fear that he would die as he had lived. It was this thought which urged Melania to set forth in the depth of winter, clad in the poorest of garments, on a journey to the capital of the Eastern Empire. She was urged onwards by a supernatural impulse to try to save the soul so dear to her. She recommended herself to the prayers of the pious in Jerusalem, and, in less than a week's time, accompanied by her chaplain and others whose names are not recorded, she was

on her way to Constantinople. By an exceptional privilege she was permitted to take advantage of the *cursus publicus*, or system of posts, organised by the imperial officials.

The story of the journey, of Melania's sojourn in Constantinople, and of her return to Jerusalem, is graphically told by her companion, who was an eye-witness of all, and is one of the most interesting portions of Gerontius's biography. In every line of the account we can plainly discern the veneration in which this heroine of charity was universally held. Throughout her long journey, everywhere as she passed, the extraordinary spectacle was presented of bishops, monks, and virgins, who, quitting for a few brief moments their solitary dwellings, crowded down the mountain sides to salute the holy woman, the rumour of whose passing had spread far and wide. They knew nothing of her beyond her noble name, and the renown of her resplendent virtues, but those who thus saw her and spoke with her for the first time were so attracted by the charm of her personality that they parted from her with strange reluctance, and with every mark of regret.

At Tripoli, Melania met with some rudeness from the officials whose duty it was to furnish mules for the continuance of the journey. Her biographer gives a quaintly interesting account of what took place. "I cannot," he says, "pass

over in silence the marvel which Our Lord worked by her means in Tripoli, because, whilst it is a good thing to keep hidden the secrets of the king, it is praiseworthy to reveal the works of God (Job xii. 7). As soon, then, as we arrived, we halted at the church of the martyr, Saint Leontius, in which church many miracles are wrought. And as there were many of us travelling with the Saint, and we were not furnished with a warrant, we found that the administrator made great difficulties about the lending of the animals for the journey, his name being Messala. The Saint was much afflicted, and she remained in prayer and vigil near the remains of the holy martyr, Leontius, from evening until the animals arrived. Now we had not long started, and had travelled only some seven miles from the town, when the aforesaid administrator came hastening after us, very much troubled, and calling, he cried out, 'Where is the priest?' Whereupon I, being inexperienced in travelling, feared that perhaps he had followed to deprive us of the animals already given, and I got down, asking him why he had come in this breathless haste. Said he: 'I beg to be permitted to speak with the illustrious lady.' Then, as soon as he saw her, he threw himself on the ground at her feet, and with abundant tears, began, 'Pardon me, servant of Christ, that I, in ignorance of thy great sanctity, delayed to



let the animals go.' But she replied, 'God will bless thee, my son, for letting us have them at all, even though thou gavest them tardily.' Then drawing forth the three pieces which I had given him as a gratuity, he besought me to take them back. As I showed myself unwilling to do this, he began to confess to the Saint: 'The whole night, myself and thy servant, my wife, were much afflicted by the holy martyr Leontius, wherefore we both rose quickly and ran to the martyr's church, where, not finding you, she turned back, not being able to run farther for want of breath, but I, having caught up with you, implore your Holiness to pray for us both, that the Lord of all things may deign to be merciful to us.' When we heard this explanation we took the pieces, and prayed, and he went away in peace and gladness. And the whole company being filled with amazement at what had happened, the Saint said: 'Take courage, for our journey is conformable to the will of God.' And as we all implored her to tell us clearly the reason, the Saint answered: 'I prayed all night to the holy martyr Leontius that he would send us a good augury for this journey, and behold, unworthy as I am, my request is granted.' And then we continued our journey, filled with joy, and respectfully saluted by all.'

When Melania reached Constantinople she was met by Lausus, one of the noblest patricians, the

patron of Palladius, and benefactor of her own monasteries. He received her with great honour and insisted that she should be his guest. Melania was a stranger in Constantinople, yet she had scarcely arrived when she was overwhelmed with visits from the noblest and most illustrious ladies, all anxious to make her acquaintance and to converse with her. The reception which she was accorded at court and the fascination which she exercised over all may be easily inferred from the fact that when the moment came for her departure both the Emperor and Empress tried by every means in their power to detain her, so much did they desire to enjoy her company for a longer time.

We have said that Melania's primary object in journeying to Constantinople was her uncle's conversion. She found Volusianus stricken with illness, which increased her anxiety and urged her to strain every nerve that he might die in the light and the faith of Christ and regenerated in the waters of baptism. At his first meeting with his angel-niece the aged ex-prefect of Rome was moved even to tears. Changed indeed she was since he had seen her last, and yet more beautiful than ever with the celestial beauty of her pure soul transfiguring her features. "When her uncle," says the biographer, "beheld her mean and poor garments, he, who was himself sur-

rounded with so much earthly luxury, shed tears and said to my insignificance: 'Perhaps, sir priest, thou dost not know in what delicacy she was reared above all others of our house? And now she has given herself up to such austerity and poverty.' But with that the Saint, beginning to speak, replied: 'Having then learned from me, my Lord, how I have trampled on glory and riches and every comfort of this life in view of the future and eternal riches which the Creator and Designer of the universe lavishes on those who truly believe in Him, do thou draw near, therefore, I pray thee, to the Fountain of immortality, that thus when thou hast renounced perishable goods, thou mayst become partaker of those which are eternal. Shake thyself free from the demons sentenced to burn in everlasting fire, together with those who obey their suggestions.' But as he perceived that she was bent upon bringing this matter before the Emperor and Empress, he was greatly troubled, and said: 'I appeal to your own piety and good feeling. Do not try to rob me of the gift of my free will which God has bestowed upon us all from the beginning. I am ready and anxious to have the filth of my many errors washed away, but if I were to do this by the Emperor's orders I should be as one who was forced to it, and I should lose the reward of my own free choice.'"

It seems clear that Melania had made a considerable impression on her uncle, but she would not leave the matter there. Though well pleased with her success, she now had recourse to the saintly Proclus, who at that time filled the see of Constantinople, praying him to visit Volusianus, and by following up the advantage which she had secured, to induce the old man at last to take the decisive step. She also begged various other illustrious personages in the city and at the court to call upon her uncle and thus help in the cause.

Fresh trials and sufferings, however, awaited Melania even in the hour of her joy at the prospect of Volusianus' conversion. In the midst of her zealous labours to that end, as well as her ceaseless efforts, continued from morning to night, to reclaim many Constantinopolitan ladies tainted with Nestorianism, Melania was suddenly seized with terrible pains, which were so acute as to paralyse all her limbs and to render her incapable of the least movement. So great were her suffering that fears were entertained for her life. She had lain for seven days in a state of ever-increasing torture when a messenger arrived from the Empress Eudoxia, whose guest Volusianus was, to inform Melania that her uncle ardently desired to see her. It was imperative that she should comply with this request without a moment's delay, otherwise Volusianus, who was in the last

extremity, might die without baptism. Who can describe Melania's anguish of mind? She entreated that she might be instantly carried to the palace, but those around her, fearing for her life and recognising the impossibility of moving her, refused to comply with her wishes. But she only renewed her entreaties. At any cost she must see and speak to her uncle. At last they yielded, and placing her, more like a corpse than a living woman, upon a litter, they bore her to the palace.

Meanwhile, Volusianus had been told that Melania was ill and unable to go to him. The dying man perhaps,—who can tell?—beholding her in spirit beside his couch, recalled her loving exhortations. Touched by Divine Grace, he requested Baptism, which was administered by the bishop Proclus who had been summoned in all haste. Another messenger was at once despatched to Melania, who had already reached the Forum of Constantine on her way to the palace. Here the messenger met her and communicated to her the glad tidings. So great was Melania's joy that she had scarcely heard the news when she found herself wonderfully better. She was able to ascend the staircase unaided, to take her seat beside the Empress, and to console the last hours of the dying man, at whose bedside she remained throughout the entire night.

At the dawn of the following day, which was the feast of the Epiphany, Volusianus, who had communicated the day before, again partook of the Blessed Eucharist, this being now the third time. Soon afterwards, Melania received his last sigh, as his rejoicing spirit passed to Heaven. Just before breathing his last, Volusianus turned to his niece, who was suggesting to him ejaculations of gratitude for the wondrous favour he had received, and said to her: "This gift of God is the reward of your efforts." Nor can we doubt it when we remember that Melania succeeded where the wisdom, the eloquence, and the sanctity of Augustine had failed. Those around that death-bed, filled with wonder, glorified the loving designs of Divine Providence. It was plain that the embassy of Volusianus to Constantinople, and Melania's journey from Jerusalem had all been brought about to the end that the soul so earnestly pleaded for might be gained to God.

Melania's apostolic zeal during her brief sojourn in Constantinople was not restricted solely to her uncle's conversion. A far wider field had been opened to it there. We are all acquainted with the serious injury inflicted on the orthodox faith in that city by the heresy of Nestorius. The Œcumenical Council of Ephesus, held five years previously, had deposed Nestorius, who, having in vain endeavoured to provoke a reaction in his

favour, was condemned to exile. But he still had warm partisans in Constantinople, chiefly amongst the nobles, supporters both of his doctrine and of his own personal ambitions. Melania, urged by that ardent zeal for the purity of faith for which she was remarkable, and by her intimate friendship with Cyril of Alexandria, who was the great champion of the dogma of Mary's Divine Maternity, which the heresiarch had impugned, defended the Church's teaching with a force of conviction impossible to be described.

Numbers of patrician ladies and men of letters sought the Saint in order to converse with her upon this burning question of the hour. Melania, all day long, from morning until nightfall, reasoned unweariedly with them. She succeeded in winning back to the truth many who had been drawn into error, whilst she confirmed others in their faith. Her powerful words, so full of grace and inspired by God, were a source of help to all who came into contact with her.

While thus busily employed, Melania observed the fortieth day after her uncle's death, according to custom, by assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which was duly offered for the repose of his soul. Desirous of spending Easter in Jerusalem, she then began to make preparations for her departure from Constantinople. Having at last overcome the reluctance of the imperial court

to allow her to take her leave, she set out on her return journey towards the end of February. The winter of that year (437) was the severest on record. All day long she journeyed through snow falling so heavily as to obliterate every vestige of earth and sky. Nothing seemed visible but the rude caravanseries where the travellers rested at night. None the less, in spite of the great severity of the weather, many bishops, desirous of testifying their great veneration for Melania, went to meet her as she passed along, and tried to induce her to refrain from continuing her journey in such bitter cold. But this stout-hearted woman held her course undeterred by snow-drifts sometimes so deep that it was almost impossible for the conveyance to proceed, while she frequently traversed long stretches of the road on foot. All these manifold hardships of the way she bore with cheerfulness, comforting her fellow-travellers, and speaking to them of God, while at the same time she rigorously observed the Lenten fast. So great was her desire to behold once more her beloved Jerusalem and the monasteries so dear to her heart, that she seemed to be borne along on wings. She reached Jerusalem in Holy Week, after a most fatiguing journey of forty-four days.

When taking leave of the Emperor Theodosius, in Constantinople, Melania had earnestly entreated



him to allow the Empress to visit the Holy Places. In the following year (438), Eudoxia, with her husband's consent, visited Palestine for the first time.

The Byzantine historians make brief and confusing allusions to this visit. We learn from the Empress herself that whilst her anxiety to venerate the principal monuments of the Christian religion had chiefly led her to undertake such a journey, yet, at the same time, her ardent desire of again beholding the holy woman whom she had previously seen in Constantinople powerfully influenced her in this resolution. Eudoxia's acts proved the sincerity of her words. During her sojourn at Jerusalem she spent each day in the company of Melania, from whom she found it impossible to tear herself. Now if we bear in mind that Eudoxia, the celebrated Athenian, was the most cultured woman of those days, we can easily understand that her great esteem and affection for Melania did not spring from any superficial feminine impressionability, but arose from solid appreciation of the sublime virtue and the extraordinary gifts with which the Saint was endowed.

When Melania heard of the arrival of the Empress she decided, after some hesitation, to go to meet her as an act of courtesy to a sovereign whom she regarded as earnestly devoted to God's

service. The meeting took place at Sidonia. The Empress received Melania with the greatest cordiality and every mark of respect. She then made her solemn entry into the Holy City, accompanied by the Saint whom she so much revered. Melania was naturally much gladdened and consoled by this visit, but, at the same time, it was the cause of great anxiety to her. On her return, the preceding year, from Constantinople, she had been pleased to find that the monks of the newly-founded monastery on the summit of the Mount of Olives were discharging all the sacred offices entrusted to them with the utmost fervour and regularity. It was then that her ardent piety suggested to her the erection of a small church in honour of the martyrs near the scene of the Ascension and adjoining the monastery. The care of this church was to be entrusted to the monks, and Melania desired that after her death the Holy Sacrifice should be offered there for her own soul and that of her beloved Pini-anus. The building was in the course of construction when the Empress visited Jerusalem, and she expressed an earnest desire that it should be finished as soon as possible in order that she might be present at its consecration. The sovereign's wishes were carried out, and Eudoxia was present at the sacred ceremony. After the relics of the martyrs had been deposited under

the altar, the Empress was passing into the monastery when she slipped and fell, spraining her ankle severely. She suffered great pain and it was found necessary to carry her to her residence in Jerusalem. Melania's grief and anxiety can scarcely be described. She hastened to the little church, but just consecrated, and there before the relics of the martyrs, with one of her sisters in religion, remained prostrate in prayer until word was brought to her that the Empress was free from all pain. Eudoxia regarded her speedy recovery as due as much to the prayers of the servant of God as to the intercession of the martyrs.

At last the hour for the departure of the Empress arrived. Melania accompanied her as far as Cæsarea, where the last farewells were said. The Empress was deeply moved, shedding tears when she took leave of her saintly companion.

The hour was now rapidly approaching when Melania was to receive the reward of all her labours. After a life which had been a resplendent model of evangelical perfection, a life of the most complete self-renunciation and detachment from all things earthly, a life ever glowing with the flames of divine charity, filled with good works and heroic conflicts, she was now about to receive a crown of immortal glory. The Saint had entered upon her fifty-seventh year when she

perceived the first heralds of the dawn of everlasting day, and henceforth in thought and spirit she dwelt in the heavenly city to which she was hastening. Her biographer, who was present at her last illness and death, has narrated the scene so vividly that we seem rather to be spectators than mere listeners to another's account. These pages in which the Saint's death is narrated are undoubtedly the most beautiful and touching in the whole biography. As we propose to quote this account at length, we will only touch here upon one or two points which seem likely to be helpful for its fuller comprehension.

It was Christmas Eve of the year 439. Melania wished to keep vigil, for the last time, as she said, in the Grotto of the Nativity. Accompanied only by her much-loved cousin, the virgin Paula, she repaired to Bethlehem, and as she desired, passed the entire night divinely happy in the sacred cave. At dawn she assisted at the most holy sacrifice of the Mass. At the conclusion of the divine mysteries she turned to her cousin, and to the latter's great consternation announced that her death was near at hand.

On the Feast of Saint Stephen she expressed a wish to visit once more the Basilica where the Martyr's venerated remains reposed. Accompanied by her chaplain and taking with her, according to custom, the bread and wine for the

Divine Oblation—this is a detail which we owe entirely to the Latin version of the Life—she proceeded to the Basilica, where she assisted at Mass. She then returned to the monastery, which was distant about a mile, and took part in the recital of the Divine Office. At its conclusion the Sisters greeted her affectionately, wishing her many years of prolonged life. In response to these greetings, she declared that the hour of her death was at hand, an announcement which filled all present with profound distress. She then repaired to the recently-built church adjoining the monastery she had founded for men. There, kneeling before the altar, she bade farewell to the monks and to the earth in a very beautiful prayer, each word of which came straight from that heart so filled with humility and so wholly enamoured of God. She had scarcely finished when she was seized with fits of shivering. Pleurisy declared itself, and before another week had passed all was over. Melania spent those few remaining days of life in prayer and in exhortations to those around her, then, as ever, edifying all by her sublime virtue. The mournful news of her serious illness spread rapidly, causing general consternation and sorrow. The dying Saint, although suffering torments of pain, received all who came to her with marvellous sweetness and serenity, and had an affectionate and consoling word for everyone. Juvenal, the

Bishop of Jerusalem, visited her with all his clergy, and gave her Holy Communion with his own hands. And here again we learn an interesting liturgical detail recorded only in the Latin text of her Life, that Melania, in receiving Holy Communion, answered "Amen" to the words spoken in giving the Sacred Host, and kissed the Bishop's right hand. Melania earnestly recommended to his care the monasteries she had founded. On Sunday, the last day of the year 439, the supreme moment came. It was the hour of sunset. In the west the sun was sinking and bathing all the world in floods of golden light, as from the east there rose towards Heaven another sun radiant with a splendour that never wanes. The Latin text seems to speak of a vision of angels seen by the dying Saint just before the end came; but, on the other hand, it tells us nothing of a second visit of the bishop which was paid to her late in the afternoon. Melania's last words were those of holy Job: *Sicut Domino placuit, ita factum est*, and then calmly closing her eyes on earth, the Saint passed to the eternal enjoyment of the Beatific Vision.

But, as already mentioned above, the account of Saint Melania's last week on earth has been given in some detail by her biographer, and nothing can quite take the place of the impression which is derived from reading his own actual words. It is

easy to see that Gerontius wrote with a deep sense of the great privilege and honour conferred upon "his insignificance"—it is by this or some similar indirect Oriental phrase that he nearly always refers to himself—by his close personal participation in the events described. The translation which follows is made from the Greek text, as this is somewhat fuller than the Latin and is also superior to the latter in point of literary form :

"After some time, like an excellent runner who, having completed the course, is now eager for the prize, Melania ardently desired to depart from the world and to be with Christ. For she sighed also, longing, as the Apostle says, 'to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from Heaven' (II. Corinth., v. 2.) The holy festival time of the birth of the Saviour having arrived, she said to her cousin, the lady Paula, 'Let us go to holy Bethlehem, for I know not if I shall see this feast again in the flesh. Therefore they repaired thither, and, having celebrated the entire vigil, they participated at daybreak in the Divine Mysteries. And then the Saint, as if she had received warning from God, spoke these words to her cousin : 'Pray for me. Henceforth, thou shalt celebrate the birthday of Our Lord alone, because the end of my mortal life is near at hand.' And on hearing these words, she (Paula) was

greatly troubled. But when they had returned from Bethlehem to the monastery, the Saint, wholly disregarding the fatigue of the vigil and the journey, went immediately to the Grotto and prayed for a long time.

“The next day we repaired to the basilica of the holy proto-martyr Stephen for the commemoration of his death, and having celebrated the liturgy there, we returned to the monastery. And in the evening, I read aloud first, then three Sisters read, last of all she read from the Acts the account of the death of Saint Stephen. As soon as she had finished the lesson, all the Sisters said to the Saint : ‘Good health to thee, mayst thou for many years yet celebrate many feasts of the Saints.’ Whereupon, as if she had received an assurance from on high, she answered, ‘Good health to you, also, but you will never again hear me recite the lessons.’ And they were all filled with anguish to hear such words, because they knew that she had spoken in a spirit of prophecy. And, like one who was about to pass from this world to the Lord, she left them her spiritual testament in these words, ‘Take great care, I pray you, after I have departed, to celebrate the Divine Office with all fear and vigilance, because it is written : “Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord negligently.” Therefore, although in a short time I shall be parted from you in body, and shall



be no more with you, God, nevertheless, who is eternal, and who fills all things, is with you Himself, and also knows the depths of each one's heart. Therefore, having this continually before your eyes, keep your souls in charity and chastity until the end, knowing that you shall appear before His tremendous judgment seat, and that each of you shall bear away either the reward of your labours or the punishment of your faults.' And whilst all experienced lively grief because they were about to lose so excellent a mistress, and one inspired by God, she, in leaving them, said to my meanness (*i.e.*, to my insignificant self) 'Let us go to the monks' oratory to pray, for there also rest the relics of Saint Stephen.' Accordingly, being thus invited by the Saint, I followed her in great grief, and when we were within the church, as if she were already the companion of the holy martyrs, she prayed aloud thus, with tears in her eyes: 'O Lord, the God of the holy martyrs, who didst know all things before the beginning, Thou knowest also that from the beginning I chose to love Thee with my whole heart, and that my bones have cleaved to my flesh from fear of Thee, for Thou hast formed me in my mother's womb, and I have consecrated my body and soul to Thee, and Thou, holding me by Thy right hand, hast led me with Thy counsel, but as I, being clothed in humanity, have many times

sinned both in word and deed against Thee, who alone art pure and without sin, accept, therefore, my prayer which with tears I offer Thee through Thy holy ones, the victors in the arena, and purify me, who am Thy handmaiden, that departing to Thee, the passage of my soul may be hastened, and that I may not be detained by malignant demons of the air; that so indeed I may pass to Thee without stain, escorted by Thy holy angels, and may be made worthy of Thy heavenly marriage feast, after hearing that blessed greeting of Thine which those in whom Thou art well-pleased shall receive from Thee: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." For ineffable are Thy mercies and the fullness of Thy compassion, and Thou savest all those that trust in Thee.' Then, again addressing her prayer to the holy martyrs, she prayed: 'Athletes of the Lord, who, in confessing Him, did shed your blood, have compassion on your humble servant, who has already venerated your holy remains, and as you have always listened to me, so now do you that are all-powerful with the God of clemency, intercede for me that He may receive my soul in peace, and may keep the monasteries in His fear.' And even before her prayer was ended, the shivering of fever seized upon her poor weak body. And returning

to the monastery of the virgins, we found that the Sisters were still engaged upon the Divine Office. And whilst I, not being able to bear up any longer, by reason of the anguish which overwhelmed me, withdrew to take a little rest, she went to take part in the Office. And the Sisters, perceiving that she was falling grievously ill, besought her to rest a little, because she had not the strength to stand upright. But she would not consent, adding : ‘ Not until we have finished the psalms of the morning Office.’ And having completed the whole service she went to lie down, and there being seized with a pain in her side, she fell into a mortal sickness. Whereupon she called for my wretched self and all the Sisters, and said to me. ‘ Behold, I am going to the Lord ; pray, therefore, for me.’ And when I heard these words my heart was wrung with sorrow.

“ Then, turning to the virgins, she addressed them in these words : ‘ I beg of you also to pray for me, for never have I wished evil to any of you. But if, indeed, I have sometimes spoken a harsh word to any one, I did it out of love for your souls. Regard yourselves, therefore, as the true servants of Christ ; spend the years of life which remain to you in all discipline, so that having your lamps lighted, you may be ready in that day for the coming of the Heavenly Bridegroom. Behold, therefore, I commend you to

God, who is all-powerful to preserve your souls and bodies. I also commend you to his reverence our priest here, and I implore you not to cause him distress in any way, but be you subject to him in all humility, knowing that he bears the burthen of you all in God's place, and that she who resists him and does not obey thereby displeases God.' Having said these words, she manifested a desire to be carried to the oratory, saying: 'Carry me near the holy martyrs.' Her illness increasing, she said to us: 'The day is closing in.' And all shed bitter tears, but the virgins, above all, wept, for they were about to lose the mother who truly and tenderly loved them. Then the Saint, perceiving that my heart also was filled with sorrow, said to me on the fifth day of her illness—it was, in fact, the day she died—'My son, all your prayers and tears are of no avail, for I have heard a voice which tells my heart that it is necessary that I, according to God's holy dispensation, must break these earthly bonds and depart to the Lord.' It was about daybreak on Sunday, and she said to me, 'May it please you to offer the Holy Sacrifice for us.' And whilst I offered, I could not speak loud on account of my great anguish. But she who was even then in her agony, when she did not hear the prayers,\* sent word to me as I stood at

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\* The word used is *epiclesis* (*ἐπικλησις*), *i.e.*, invocation, and may here have a technical sense.

the altar, 'Raise your voice that I may hear the words of the invocation.'

"After she had thus assisted at the Divine Mysteries, the bishop, most dear to God, arrived, accompanied by his clergy, and after they had exchanged suitable words concerning the salvation of the soul, finally, the Saint said to him: 'I have commended to you our priest and the monasteries, and I have provided for them all like a good shepherd for his faithful sheep, following the footsteps of the Master.' And he, beholding how much goodness was about to depart from the earth, was greatly troubled. The Saint having asked for Communion from him also, took leave of him in peace. Then the pious monks of her monastery presented themselves, and she said to them; 'On the point of departing from this precarious life, I bid you farewell, and I pray you in all things to give comfort to our priest, knowing that thereby you please the Lord of all things, for, being free from all responsibility, he became your servant for love of our Lord, and while he is not obliged to do so, he yet bears the burthen of you all.'

"Then the monks of the other monasteries, and very many from the city, came. And this truly noble woman, although afflicted with agonising pain, showed herself mindful of everything, and with a brave heart and much patience spoke

to all words of farewell such as were befitting. Then the lady Paula, her cousin, together with her own friends, came to her, and to all she spoke words of admonition, but, in particular, she consoled her cousin who was faint with sorrow at her departure, and, with many prayers and blessings, took leave of her. Last of all, she addressed these words to my miserable self: 'It is, indeed, superfluous to make appeal to the love of God in thy heart that thou mayst take thought for the monasteries. For, whilst I was yet in the flesh, thou didst bear the care and the burthen of all, and didst help in everything. Therefore I now recommend to thee the monasteries, and implore thee that now, much more than ever, thou wilt undertake this charge, for which God will reward thee in the life to come.' And when she had bidden all farewell in peace, she added: 'Let us pray.' And thus she dismissed everyone, saying: 'Let me rest, now.' About the ninth hour she began to grow weaker, and we, thinking that she was dead, tried to stretch her feet. But reviving somewhat, she said to my worthless self, in a faint voice: 'The hour has not yet come.' And although I had not strength to bear the sorrow with which I was overpowered, I answered: 'When the hour comes wilt thou give us warning?' And she answered: 'Yes.' This she said, as I conceive, to signify that it was not necessary

to straighten her limbs after death. In the meantime holy men remained there with me, for this was always her prayer, to render up her spirit in the midst of Saints. And then there came again the bishop, most dear to God, together with the anchorets from around Eleutheropolis, most holy men, and he said to the Saint: 'Thou, who whilst on earth didst fight the good fight, dost indeed go gladly to the Lord, and all the angels rejoice thereat; but we can only sorrow at the separation from thy company, which was of great profit to all.' And she replied with these last words: 'As the Lord willed, so is it done.' And then, tranquilly and placidly in gladness and rejoicing, she gave up her holy soul to God the same evening of Sunday, that thus might be manifested her great love for the Lord and for His holy Resurrection. There was no need to lay out her saintly body, for her feet were stretched and her hands clasped upon her breast, and her eyes naturally closed. Therefore, according as she had arranged, the holy Fathers gathered from various parts, and having all night, with great impressiveness, recited the Office and the lessons, they bore her to the grave. The garments in which she was buried were worthy of her sanctity, and I think it well to call attention thereto for the benefit of those who may light upon this narrative.

“She had the tunic of a certain Saint (*i.e.*, ascetic) and the maphorion of another servant of God ; from another, part of her apron ; from another, her cincture, which last she also wore in life ; while her hairy cowl also had belonged to another. Then in place of a pillow we used the cowl of skin once owned by another Saint, which we arranged under her venerable head. With reason was her body thus robed in the garments of those whose virtues she had acquired for herself in life. She had no linen garments except a sheet in which we enshrouded her already dressed as she was.

“The Saint’s prayer had been heard. She ascended to Heaven with rejoicing, having put on virtue as a garment. Wherefore the powers of darkness did not molest her, because they could find upon her nothing of their own. But the holy angels joyfully received her, for in her corruptible body she imitated their immunity from earthly passions, and the holy prophets and apostles, whose actions and doctrines she carried out in her own life, made her one of their choir ; and the holy martyrs, whose memory she glorified and whose conflicts she voluntarily took upon herself, met her in gladness. Thus she receives in Heaven the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, those things I mean which God



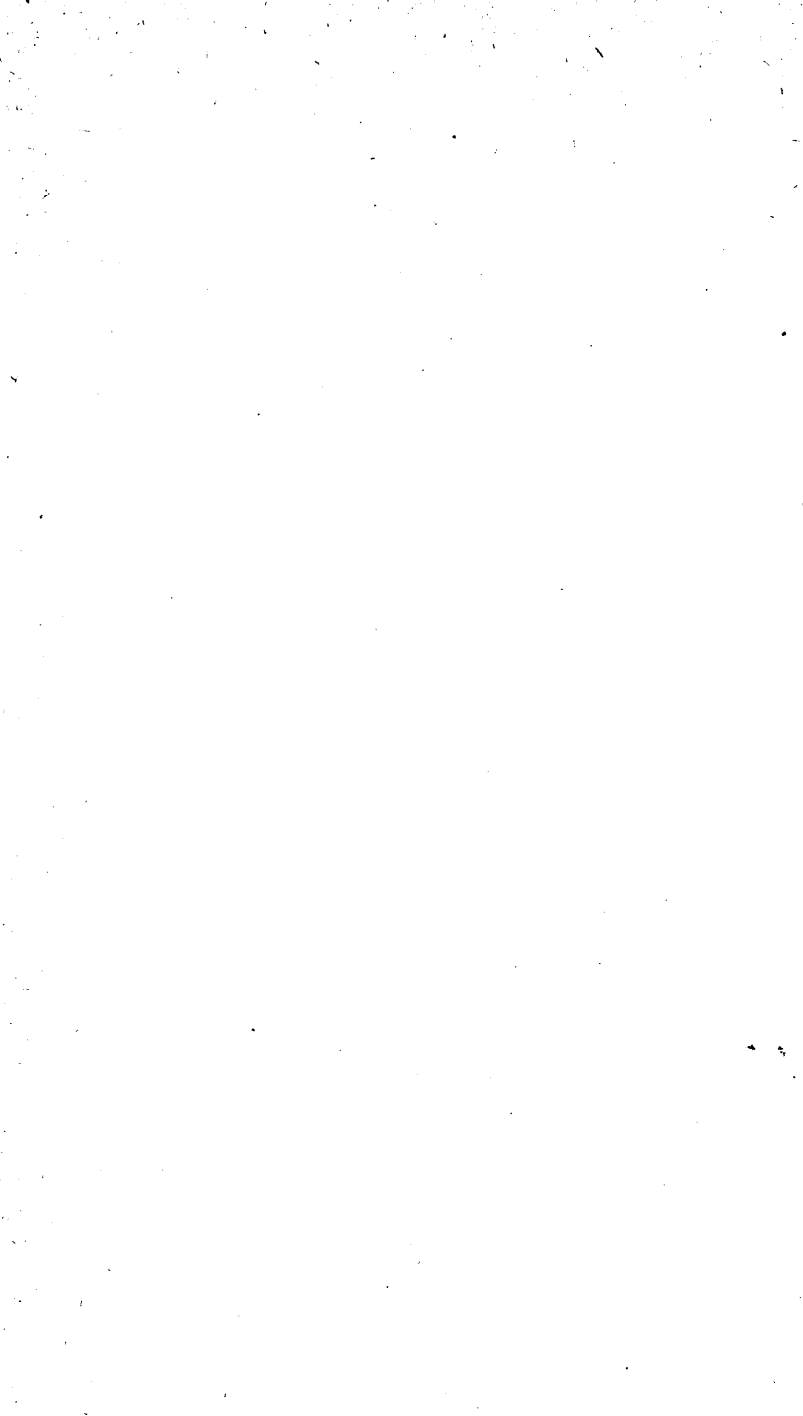
hath prepared for those who love Him. To whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen."

Such is the doxology with which Gerontius, according to Greek custom, concludes his account of the life of the holy virgin, who had been to him in turn friend, mother, and patron. Even whilst yet alive Melania had been in a sense canonized by two illustrious Fathers of the Church. St. Paulinus, who had known her from infancy, called her "the blessed child," *benedicta parvula*, and "the joy of Heaven," *gaudia cœli*. St. Augustine, who knew her in her maturer years, regarded her, and her husband also, as "true lights of the Church," *lumina Ecclesiæ*, by reason of their virtue and their example in the midst of a most corrupt society.

Soon after her death the Church of the East, with supreme veneration, placed her on her altars amongst those who were most illustrious for sanctity in those early ages of faith. Every year her feast was celebrated with great rejoicings and with the singing of canticles composed in her honour. Her name was also inscribed, though later, upon the Church's roll-call of Saints in the West. It is only in her native land that her memory is in oblivion.

THE END.





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